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GOLDEN GLORY

BY

F. HORACE ROSE

AUTHOR OF
"AN IMPRESSIONIST IN ENGLAND,"
"ON THE EDGE OF THE EAST," ETC.

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CHAPTER I

Of the coming of the Dwarf.

In the year of the Great Snowstorm thousands of cattle perished, and the people died in scores. Tsotelo's tribe was wiped out, so that only ten men were left out of a thousand. This happened in the shadow of the Berg, where the snow fell thickest.

It was in that year, but later, that Chaka's armies came down like the locusts for multitude and laid waste the land. Sekonyela brought them, and the battle which he and the Zulus fought against Napo at the Place of the Ox is remembered to this day.

In that year, also, Napo, called "The Dwarf," came into the country which is now Basutoland, but in that day had no name and a hundred names. It is of Napo's coming and of what happened thereafter that this tale tells.

. . . . . .

The snowstorm burst on the land in such fashion as no man had ever seen or heard of. There had been cold nights for a week before. Quathlamba had stood up dark and forbidding against the grey skies, but with a white crest where the mists swirled and eddied.

On the sixth night a rain of sleet drove down the valleys upon Tsotelo's people, where they were kraaled on the bare slope of a hill fronting the mountains. Tsotelo, who was always drunk three parts of his time, gave in now and got drunk the other part. He did this to keep the cold out, it seems; but in vain. For next day the snow came, and before long old Tsotelo had shivered the soul out of his carcase and was as stiff as a church steeple.

The snow fell at first loosely, then with a long, steady drift which banked it up against the sides of the huts and covered the kraal fences. Then suddenly it began to come in a great blinding swirl, driven by a furious wind that rushed down the mountain-side in howling tempests. The gale whirled it here and cast it there, but never so quickly that snow could not pile on snow—till the kloofs were thick with it to the depth of twenty feet.

All that day and all night it snowed ceaselessly, and Tsotelo's people crouched in their wretched huts and shivered in the perishing cold. Pombeta, the *ngaka* (witch-doctor) of that kraal, contrived a magic out of ashes mixed with the gall of a sick ox. He added thereto some choice poisons and made his worst enemy swallow it. But it did not amount to much. Pombeta's enemy died in the most satisfactory manner, but the snow kept on falling; and, before Pombeta could think of any more devilry worth trying, he was dead too.

Next day the storm was worse. Up on the mountain-side the snow was piled in monstrous and fantastic masses. Tsotelo's people, foodless and frozen, watched it, and saw in the krantzes near their kraal that the sheep and cattle were lying dead. They looked long and earnestly at the mountain and at the snow piling up higher and higher around their crazy huts. Many of them died that day, some of the old men and the children. A woman who went out, thinking to escape the White Death, came back no more.

Up on the mountain-side, right among the snows, a man gazed down on Tsotelo's people; looked down and saw, as well as the snow would let him, the white mantle wrap them round and cover them, stark and stiff, from mortal sight. But he did not look long nor see far. He was stumbling, fighting, crawling, like a black baboon, over spikes of jutting rock, wallowing to the height of his thighs in the snow-drifts, beating the white, drifting masses with his hands. He was perishing by inches up there on the mountain. Yet he would not give in. He had come far and climbed high before the storm broke and he lost his way. Then, for a night and half a day, he had fought and struggled on; and now he was battling his way down towards the valley. Better,

he thought, to die, if die he must, amongst men than amongst eagles! At least his body might be found and might receive burial.

His brain was benumbed, so that he could think even this much with difficulty. His limbs, thick and shapeless as a gnarled tree and black as ebony, ached as though hot irons were searing them. His head drooped upon his huge chest. His arms, longer by far than most men's, hung at his sides, with strength only now and then to steady a way for his bleeding feet over the stones and through the yielding snow. He looked up from time to time, as if searching in some dumb and unconscious manner for deliverance. His face was as gnarled and twisted as his limbs. It was the face of an ogre rather than a man; a face which, had Pombeta seen it, he would have hailed as a more than sufficient excuse for the failure of his magic.

He stumbled and dragged himself along. He was heavy with sleep, weighed down with weariness, blind, tottering, and dumb. Still he fought on, for the soul of this man was greater than his body, which was small.

Once when he looked up he saw that the sun was about to set behind the grey curtain of fog and snow. There was a slit in the curtain there—a slit through which the dying light must soon come, to guide him perhaps to safety, possibly to death. So he paused and waited for it.

Presently it came. The dull radiance that was striving with the storm, somewhere behind that thick curtain of swirling grey, mysteriously enlarged and widened. Ridges of flaming red appeared on the western sky, against which masses of steel-blue cloud were silhouetted. Their brightness was a thing of moments only. They were like islands in a swiftly rising river of mist and darkness. One by one they were swallowed up and submerged. But suddenly there came a shaft of glory through the under edges of the cloud. It smote upon the snows about him, touching them with a crimson stain. Higher on the mountain-side that shaft of light seemed to quiver and go out and come to life again. Then it passed, leaving the snows more cold and lifeless than before.

But, as it sank and the world grew dark, this man with the body of a dwarf and the soul of a giant looked up—and behold! he saw the gleam of light on rock, and in the centre of the light a blackness. He knew it for a cave. From descending towards the valley he turned and began climbing towards the peak.

"As well seek safety with eagles as with men when the whole world is dying!" was the thought which struggled through his benumbed brain.

It was a long climb, a long, aching climb, up steep slippery rocks and through snow-drifts that touched his waist. But he came to the place at last.

There was a great ledge of overhanging, glistening rock; a few shreds of wet, stunted grass on its underside; masses of snow everywhere; and a narrow cavity leading into darkness. The man crept in upon his hands and knees like a baboon; crept in farther still; turned from the narrow opening sideways, feeling the wall of rock with his frozen hands, and drinking in the warmth of the inner air; saw before him, far in the distance of the low gallery, a light that looked like fire but might have been the sunset for aught he knew, so dazed was he; and suddenly, on seeing it, fell forward on his face and slept.

Never did a man sleep more soundly!

CHAPTER II

How the Dwarf found a friend who would have slain him; why the Dwarf commenced his story; and a short dissertation on the people of this period.

NAPO the Dwarf opened his eyes and stretched himself with great pain. His limbs were stiff and sore, his head ached, his feet were swollen. But he lived, and that was something.

He sat up little by little, his limbs cracking as he did so. He looked round to see where he was. He found himself in a cave, narrow and high, but apparently of great length; for its end was lost in darkness. Where he lay, however, some faint rays of light touched the surrounding rocks, upon which he discerned brightly coloured and fantastic shapes. There were beasts on the flat surface of those rocks that were half ox, half hippopotamus; men that were half man, half buck; huts that were like mountains; mountains that were like huts. They went up out of the narrow circle of light into the cavernous obscurity above. The people who painted them knew how to lay on colours so vivid and so thick that they would outlast the centuries. They were great artists according to their time and fashion. They knew the difference between a crocodile and a cow, and when they painted a man you knew it for a man and not a tree, because they put his face on sideways and showed his body fronting you. But their idea of perspective was rudimentary, so that most of their men and animals had the appearance of having come through a mangle.

But Napo was not possessed of the artistic sense in any degree at all, and these bushman paintings could have imposed on him as easily as some of the daubs

in the world's famous galleries and have passed for masterpieces. Anyway, he gave up looking at them soon enough, and for a good reason. With returning consciousness, and an awakening of all his faculties from sleep, he realised that he was hungry. Not with the hunger of a man who has abstained from food past his time and would enjoy a snack, but with the hunger of one who has waited a year for dinner and could eat a continent. He was raging; he was famished. Moreover, he found by experiment that he was so weak he could scarcely crawl. Food he must have, and that soon, or he would perish!

So he set forth, dragging himself stiffly along the passage towards the darkness, to see whether there was in this cave any morsel a man might eat. As he crept along he noticed that the light was growing stronger; either it was day-dawn on the mountains, or the snow had ceased and the fog was lifting. When he had gone some twenty yards or so, he turned a corner and peered round it cautiously.

He saw that at the far end of the cave (for here it terminated) there was a fire burning on a place scooped out of the rock. Near to it sat a creature that seemed half child, half ape, upon whose yellow, wrinkled skin the firelight danced and shone. It seemed to be a child, at least in stature, till it turned suddenly and rose, revealing the diminutive proportions of a man. It had a face like a baboon's for ugliness and sin. A short, stubbly black beard, like tufts of burnt grass; frizzed hair sticking out in woolly spirals and shorn around the ears; a flat, narrow chest; a slender waist, around which hung a circlet of jackals' pelts; and very thin yellow legs, adorned with a few beads and streaked with paint—such were the outward characteristics of the cave-dweller. In one hand he held a spear of rough workmanship, in the other a wooden spoon with which he was stirring some soupy mess in a pot that stood on the fire. As Napo drew near the diminutive creature gave a grunt like a baboon's, and raised the spear to the level of his shoulder. Napo felt instinctively for his own weapon, then remembered he had lost it in the snow and was defenceless.

"Slay not!" said Napo, tottering to his feet. "I beg of you some food only. I am perished!"

"How are ye named?" asked the little yellow man.

"I am called Napo the Dwarf, and I give you greeting!"

"I am called Baroa the Bushman," said the other, and, though he gave no greeting with it, he lowered his spear. "Whence came ye, and why are ye here?"

"I come from a far country, on a long journey that is not yet ended," said Napo. "Give me to eat and I will tell you all."

"Ye have slept while the sun set twice," said Baroa the Bushman. "I could have slain you as ye slept. Come here and eat, and I will slay you afterwards."

This being just the invitation to whet a man's appetite and ensure him a good, satisfying meal, Napo accepted it. He was so ravenous that he would have fallen to on poisoned carrion. As it was—well, before you could count two, Napo was diving with his fingers into that pot and very expeditiously emptying it. The Bushman squatted beside the fire on his haunches.

"Eat well," he said, and fingered his spear with a grin.

Napo, the fiercest pangs of his hunger stayed, looked up with a start. The Bushman gave a short laugh like a bark.

"Better for a man to die with his belly filled," he said, pleasantly.

Napo, his hunger becoming gradually appeased, showed a disposition to argue the matter.

"Best not to die at all!" he rejoined. "Why should you who speak my language, though badly, desire to kill me, who have done you no harm and would go my way peaceably?"

"Go your way whither and for what?" asked the other. "As for this language ye boast about, I have learned such barking from dogs of the bush who hunt me now, and to whom ye would deliver me if I let you begone and live."

"These dogs of the bush are not my people," said Napo. "What profit is it to me to deliver up to them

one that has fed me from his own pot, when perchance I am hunting those very dogs?"

There were but a few morsels still left in the pot, but Napo, with the argument undecided to his satisfaction, was disposed to prolong his meal.

"If I let you go," said Baroa the Bushman, "ye will journey from this cave into the valley yonder and meet with Tsotelo's people. They have set a price on my head for the goats I have taken. Ye are eating one now."

"Then it tastes the better for being stolen from Tsotelo's people," said Napo. "As for them, if you mean that kraal at the foot of the mountain yonder, the man that would meet with these people must dig for them." And he told what he had seen of the snowfall—the tops of the huts jutting out, and the dead cattle.

"Good!" said Baroa. "Yet if I let you go ye may be bound for the stronghold of Matlapo. That man is covetous and of a vile temper. He seeks me because of some corn that was lying by the way when I passed."

"I am not bound thither, and I know him not."

"Well, perchance ye may go yonder along the spur of the mountain to where Makolane herds his cattle and looks for the oxen I stole?"

"I go not there either," said Napo, doing his best not to finish the contents of the pot before the question was settled. "Listen, Bushman, and I will tell you whence I come and whither I go, and why I am in this land seeking other matters than to give up to the slayers those against whom there may be charges, true or false."

Baroa put down the spear which he had raised in his hands once more and rested it against his knees.

"Tell on," he said. "It matters little whether I kill you now, or first hear the story."

He passed over a split reed containing a little snuff.

"Stolen from a man named Tshengoba," he observed, with modest pride. "These skins also came from his hut. He lies in a donga, meat for vultures. This spear, which I plucked from his bosom, did it."

He laughed affably, and Napo took snuff and sneezed

over it. Robbery and murder, if they were of any account at all in those parts, were rather creditable than otherwise. But, generally speaking, private murders were not worth much trouble, except that the relatives occasionally objected. The country was overrun just then—had been for a generation—with wandering tribes, mostly hostile. They got up between them massacres and devastations on a wholesale scale; passed their days in unprovoked attacks and spent their nights in desperate resistances; moved about the country in a procession of bloody forays and criminalities of the most atrocious character; and thought nothing of murdering a hundred people because someone had gone off with an ox, or of burning fifty kraals because a few fowls were stolen. Those were the picturesque and palmy days of barbarism; "the good old times," which have had their counterpart in the civilisations of only a century ago, or less, when every horror and injustice that could be conceived by Church or State was practised by men who deemed themselves educated and enlightened. These South African savages of a hundred years back did not know what education was —except, of course, that they were educated in all manner of bestiality and crime from their youth up. And they had no State and no Church; notwithstanding which, they got along wonderfully well, and invented as many cruelties and practised as many judicial crimes as though they possessed both these humanising agencies that have shed so much hell-fire around our own ancestry.

For some things, no doubt, these ignorant savages were to be pitied. But when it came to grinding the last ounce of blood and oppression out of perspiring humanity, there was not one of the gilt-edged nations of Christendom but had cause to envy them for their chances.

Baroa the Bushman was an outlaw; but, in a country where one-half the population was outlaw to the other half, the position conferred upon him no distinction whatever. Napo the Dwarf was a wanderer; but, as there was scarcely a man in the land who was anything else or had a home he could count on for a month

against attack and ruin, his position, too, lacked novelty. And that both were out for murder, in different ways and for different reasons, was so commonplace a circumstance in those days as to be hardly worth mentioning.

When one of these people set out to tell his story, therefore, the other could not be expected to feel, nor did he in any way display, even the mildest surprise at events in it which would nowadays have secured for the narrator prominent notice in the newspaper descriptions of a hanging.

CHAPTER III

The Dwarf's story.

"I HAVE come," said Napo, beginning his story, "from a far country, over there," and he pointed to the North. "If you journeyed for a year you would not reach it, for it is beyond hills, swamps, and mountains, and great waters that thunder into ravines and spread out so far that the eye cannot see to the end of them. My tribe is the Bafokeng, the tribe of Napo. It is older than the hills themselves. I, Napo, come from a race which was great and powerful when the world was new. I know these things, Baroa, because they were told by Kuena, the wizard of our tribe.

"Thousands of years ago the people of Napo, that are now called the Bafokeng, dwelt by the banks of a great river with many cataracts. Beyond the place where they dwelt lived another people, a race of warriors like mine, who worshipped other gods and made for themselves mighty temples and images of stone. These people warred continually with the dwellers upon their borders, carrying off thousands as slaves for their armies or captives for their harems. Their kings were rich and mighty, and their armies came in great multitudes and ate up the land.

"One day an army of these people came down upon the water in things that floated—monsters that crawled over the waters with an hundred legs and carried men in their bellies. These things came into the land of Napo, and all the people assembled in fear to see them. It is told that a man issued from one of these monsters—a man who was their king, his head circled above the brow by a great band of gold—and, in the language of our people, offered gifts and declared peace. Our

people, being thereby deceived, assembled peaceably in great multitudes. But at a signal they were attacked. Men poured from the bowels of these water-devils like bees from bushes. Many of our people were slaughtered and thousands fled. Those that fled were pursued, and there was a great fight; for ours were a fierce people given to war, though in this matter treachery had proved too strong for them.

"Nevertheless, they made a stand against the army of the North, and, after a great fight, drove them back, so that those that were left from the slaughter were quick to escape in the crawling monsters which had brought them. But this man I spoke of, with the band of gold upon his forehead, was slain by Napo, king of the people of Napo. Napo put that band of gold upon his own brow as a sign of conquest, and by it the kings of my people have been known from that day.

"It was found after the battle that our people had been killed in vast numbers and our place beside the river destroyed, so that to stay there was impossible, since these soldiers from the North would be certain to return against us. Therefore a council of the tribe was held, and it was agreed to leave that place and seek another.

"That, Baroa, was the beginning of a wandering which lasted for more than a thousand years; a wandering in which the people of Napo fought here, were beaten there, conquered yet again, and always marched on and on, southward. They grew in number to be a mighty people; and yet, as they grew, their strength diminished. For in those years many arose who claimed chieftainship, and these split up the nation, going hither and thither with their followers to found other tribes. They spread out east and west, and it is said that their children are now everywhere as the locusts for multitude. I know this to be true, because I have spoken with those that are learned in the history of our people. Men have I seen, who have journeyed from beside the Great Water (the Indian Ocean) and have told me of the Bafokeng coming more than a thousand years ago and dwelling there under many names. I know, too, that some of our people came this way, and

how from that stock sprung the Zulus who rule beyond these mountains. Their customs and ours are much alike. I have been to that country, and I know. It is in part because of a custom of our people, and of theirs, that I am now so far from my land and the nation which bore my name.

"Know ye, Baroa, that in ages past the main body of our tribe came to a place beyond the rivers and the spreading waters and established themselves there. For hundreds of years they grew and flourished, and each king that ruled them was called Napo, after him who was the greatest of all our kings, him who slew that army of the North and captured its kingly crown. I, too, am called Napo, being come from the line of kings, and in name I am myself the king of that people, though in fact I am otherwise and a wanderer. It came about in this wise. See!" and here Napo rose up, displaying his deformed but gigantic proportions.

"Look, Baroa, at this back of mine, how bent it is. Look at these arms, longer than any man's of our tribe. Look at these legs, shorter even than thine, but thicker. Look ye and know that to be born thus has been accounted by our people from the beginning as a crime to be visited by death! It is the same with the people of the Zulu, and to this day it is so with every branch of our nation. Fools that they are, they hold that only the well-made man can be a good warrior!"

While he stood thus, with arms outstretched and legs bent as if crouching, Baroa gazed up in admiration of his enormous proportions. Unconsciously the spear slipped from between the Bushman's fingers and rested lightly upon his knees. The next second Napo the Dwarf had sprung upon his host with the agility and swiftness of a cat, had pinned him to the earth with one grip of his mighty paw, and had possessed himself of the weapon. Then he released the astounded Bushman and subsided on his haunches on the other side of the fire.

"Warriors!" he ejaculated, as though no interruption had broken the tenor of his story—"Why with these bare hands I have slain in battle till my arms were red to the elbows! With this fist I have felled an ox at

one blow! With these arms I have crushed a man's head against my ribs like a cracked gourd, so that that man fell down and died and all men wondered! Warriors, in truth! Give me shield and spear and I will stand up in combat against ten men, Baroa, and pay forfeit with my head if one of them lives to tell the tale!"

Baroa, realising with a gulp that the tables had been turned against himself, uttered a feeble ejaculation, suggestive of approval, and hoped his visitor would be satisfied without embarking on any practical demonstration of his prowess.

"I am lithe as a leopard, Baroa," said Napo with a smile, "though heavy of build, I admit that. I am also cunning at times, though not of any repute therein, save when I may chance to save my life thereby, as I did just now, on the pretence of showing my infirmities—whereas I coveted that spear of yours, Baroa, and feel the kindlier towards you now that I have it. But have no fear of me, Bushman. I have eaten of your food and have sheltered in your hut, which is a meet place for baboons and jackals like ourselves. So have no fear. I will tell my story; and, if by any mischance I should repent of my clemency and slay you afterwards, that will be no more than you would have done for me when my meal was finished."

Saying this, Napo took the last morsel from the pot, where he had left it to prolong the feast, and swallowed it at a gulp.

"So," he continued, as he smacked his lips gratefully, "that stolen goat seemeth to have a better flavour. Listen now to the rest of the story."

He told it at great length; but it is here summarised and shortened. There was a snowstorm outside which might last a week, and in any case he wanted to rest and talk, so that there was no hurry. As for the Bushman, he was never before so glad of a chance to listen. He kept his eye on that spear, coveting a chance to spring up and seize it. But it was no use, Napo kept hold of it with the grasp of grim death. Therefore Baroa listened; and now and then, to prolong the story, he harked back and stirred up some of the oldest parts

of it, so that Napo had to go back, too, and dig into antiquity, and tell bits of it over again. Whenever there seemed to be a likelihood of the tale drawing to a close, Baroa did this; and of course Napo's skill as a tale-teller was enormously flattered by such evidence of a yearning to know all the details. There never was a tale so spun out or beaten so thin. Baroa got tired of it before the end, but managed to conceal the fact, and pretended to be speechlessly attentive.

Sometimes he laughed at Napo's witticisms, and that pleased Napo. So Baroa did the same again, and overdid it, and sometimes laughed in the wrong places. But it was of no consequence. Napo had a thoroughly satisfying time talking about himself—which, after all, is the most fascinating subject for anyone to talk about. When the tale was finished it was all Baroa could do, at the risk of disembowelment, to prevent him telling it over again.

As he was saying when he interrupted himself to seize the spear, the penalty of death should, by the custom of the people, have fallen on him notwithstanding that he was born of the king's head wife. But it chanced that, about the time of his birth, his mother performed a noticeable service to the fire-eating old wizard of the tribe, called afterwards, and for the following reason, Kuena the Crocodile.

This man was a great and distinguished doctor, who made a speciality of curing floods. As the Bafokeng dwelt by the side of a great river, in a country where the rainfall was heavy and storms frequent, a flood-doctor was a national necessity and was kept busy. Not a single flood had occurred for fifty years but Kuena had made a medicine for it; and he had cured nearly every case inside a week. His successes were truly marvellous, and he very soon dropped the ordinary forms of doctoring and became a specialist in this business. Other tribes for more than a hundred miles around would send for him and pay him handsomely when floods descended on their territory. Kuena invariably made a medicine before he set out for the afflicted area, and so potent was it that in nine cases out of ten, unless the flood was very near by, a cure was effected and the flood had gone down

before he got there. Sometimes it subsided even before the messenger arrived to tell him about it; and this was accounted for by the fact that Kuena, conversing with spirits, heard about the flood and made a medicine well in advance, out of compassion for the afflicted people. Frequent generosities of this sort had made him extremely popular.

But Kuena's doctoring was not solely of the beneficent order. From long and intimate acquaintance with the ways, habits, and characteristics of floods he had acquired the means not only of curing but also of causing them. In fact, it was long since admitted by everybody who knew anything that very few floods occurred in those regions for which Kuena was not personally responsible.

When a flood came and somebody's crops were swept away and a few people drowned, investigation always proved that Kuena had good grounds for inflicting the punishment. And when, after a handsome payment, he doctored the flood and it went down and things became normal, that proved it was best to please so powerful a personage in all things.

The magic for making floods Kuena carried around his neck in a ratskin bag, and in another bag he carried the medicine for curing them. It is hard to say whether he was respected more for the magic or for the medicine. Probably for the former, since fear is a more potent creator of respect than gratitude. But in any case, Kuena scored both ways, and he scored heavily.

He carried about with him also another bag, in which he stocked some choice samples of thunder which he used frequently about the kraal. But he admitted he did this chiefly by way of pastime. He never had much professional respect for thunder, though he agreed it made a good, showy frilling when he fetched a really big flood along.

One day, after the rains, the river near the great kraal of the Bafokeng came down in flood, and Kuena went to the banks to doctor it. No flood ever subsided in that country before it was properly doctored. If the heart of a chicken and the liver of an ox, fried over a slow fire and mixed with gall, was not put into the river, with

incantations, that flood would last for ever and ever, and nobody would ever be able to cross that river again. And it was a remarkable fact that, not long after the doctoring, the river always subsided; which proved beyond doubt the efficacy of such treatment.

On this occasion Kuena lay down on the river's bank with his platter of medicines and thrust his arm into the water up to the shoulder. But some other wizard must have bewitched the medicines that time, for just as he began the proper incantations a crocodile appeared and grabbed him by the arm. Kuena gave a yell which roused the neighbourhood for a mile round. The first to get to the scene was the head wife of the king, who was in a field near by. She rushed straight to where the wizard lay on the bank howling, and seized him round the middle. She pulled, and the crocodile pulled; the upshot being that she fell over backwards, with Kuena on top of her, and the crocodile slid down into the water with Kuena's arm and made a meal of it. When Kuena got well again and had time to think things over, he discovered that the chicken's heart had been accidentally left out of the mixture. That explained everything.

Now it happened that this incident occurred only three days before Napo was born. When it was seen that the infant was deformed immediate preparations were made to slay it, according to the custom of the country. But before this could be done the mother sent for Kuena, who came with his arm swathed at the shoulder and very weak from loss of blood. To him the mother put this case: that, by reason of an event in which he, the wizard, was concerned, the child was born into the world before its time and was therefore misshapen; and that, since the spirits had intended it for a well-shapen child, as befitted the offspring of kings, it could not be their will that the child should die. To this she gained the assent of Kuena the Crōcodile, laying it upon him as a charge, in return for the life she had saved him, that he should save the child.

Kuena accordingly called a council of the people and told how the spirits had revealed to him in a vision that the child must live, being born that way only as a sign that the spirits loved and protected Kuena. The sound-

ness of this reasoning was not questioned; but there was a great talk over the matter, some being for the old custom, others fearing the wrath of the spirits if Kuena's word was disobeyed. By an interposition of Providence a thunderstorm came up during the argument. So Kuena took off some of the skin-bags from around his neck and declared that if his word was not properly respected he would be under the painful necessity of blasting someone. He opened the thunder-bag as he said this, and a roll of artillery went round the skies. Then he opened his lightning-bag, and after a little time the heavens were illuminated by a glare. Even the objectors began to waver then; and presently, when a flash came down on the far side of the river where the outcrop of iron ore was plentiful, and struck a tree, there was not a man but would have voted with both hands for the child to live.

But even in such circumstances a compromise must be effected to mollify the malcontents. So Kuena addressed the people again, saying that the spirits had told him most explicitly that although its life should be spared, the child should never be allowed to rule over the people, since a dwarf could not be a man and therefore still less a king. Further, he was to have no place in the king's household, but was to live with Kuena, where he could be better looked after.

But this ruling, as he cried it aloud to the people, was heard by the mother in the hut close by, and before the words died from his lips she came forth and stood before the whole multitude with the child in her arms. At this a great shout went up that a woman unpurified after childbirth should show herself before the people, and some would have slain her then and there. But the mother bade them in a loud voice to listen. Holding the child up in her arms for all to see, she cried:

"I, who am near to death, give you a prophecy! This son of mine, called the Dwarf, though he shall not rule over the Bafokeng, shall yet be their deliverer, and shall give to them a ruler of great justice and mercy. In the body of that ruler I, though a woman, shall dwell in spirit. I have seen it through fire and blood and great darkness! I have seen it through the morning mists!

I have looked across thousands of dead bodies and have seen it upon a hillside in the dawn! I have seen it in long journeys through strange lands! I have seen it in fierce battles between mighty peoples! I have seen it by flood and mountain, and upon the snows, and I have heard it in the noise of waters—that Napo the Dwarf shall give to you a great ruler, crowned with the golden band of our people." She pointed to where the king, her husband, sat. Upon his brow was the broad band of gold which had been the crown of these kings since that time, thousands of years before, when the Napo of that day wrested it from the brow of the king whose army was defeated beside the Great River.

"It is," said Napo the Dwarf, "a saying of our people that 'none may rule who does not sit in Golden Glory'; and this is certain, that when a king dies that golden band is taken from his brow and is set upon the forehead of the new king. Whence it comes that the kings of Napo have been so distinguished by a golden crown for as long almost as the nation has existed."

Well, when the woman had made this prophecy, Kuena the Crocodile rose up and said he had seen the whole thing himself, in exactly the way she saw it, but had forborn to mention the matter because he knew perfectly well that she would come from the hut and tell it. And that night the mother died, which proved conclusively that he was inspired.

Under the roof of Kuena Napo the Dwarf grew up, or grew just so far as his misshapen limbs permitted. In due time his father died and was succeeded by Napo's half-brother by another wife. This man misgoverned the country to such extent as to invoke an alliance with a neighbouring chief named Sekonyela, who for years past had cast covetous glances at the possessions of the Bafokeng. The alliance, craftily entered into by Sekonyela, was disastrous for the new king. He saw himself being gradually ousted from his high place by one act after another of pretentious arrogance. The people murmured against him for his weakness, and some of them began to side with Sekonyela, who, after the manner of tyrants, white or black, presumed on his authority at the expense of the general public. Trouble

grew. The nation became divided and, in its division, so weak that Sekonyela thought the time had arrived to strike a blow. He accordingly looked around him for a pretext, and, at the crafty suggestion of one of his councillors named Maponda the Owl, discovered one in the royal House of Napo.

One of the princesses of that House was a girl named Haika, famed in the country for her beauty. Knowing full well that she disliked him, and not caring much whether she did or did not, Sekonyela made demand of her hand in marriage. She refused, of course; whereupon the upstart, armed with a pretended grievance, went to the king about it. The king endeavoured to persuade the princess, and thereby split the tribe up into two more camps, one which sided with the king, and the other which upheld the princess on the ground that Sekonyela was basely born and could not marry into the royal house. This sort of quarrel has been of the commonest all over Africa since time began, and it has invariably ended in bloodshed. Such was the case now.

Sekonyela brought his own people to the great kraal and attacked it with vast numbers. The king, forced at last to defend his crown, gathered his men and fought nobly, and there was a battle that lasted some days and carpeted the veld with corpses. All the people of both tribes, frantic to the point of desperation, took part in it. Even the women and children fought, and in all the history of those people there had never been such slaughter. And the peculiarity of this war was that both sides were defeated!

The slaying was so great and so continuous that of neither tribe was there more than a remnant left. The fight ended one morning in the small hours, when a stand was made round the person of the king. Sekonyela, with his depleted following, attacked the kraal for the tenth time, and set fire to it. By the light of the blazing huts the fight was kept up, and it ebbed and flowed over the piles of dead and dying till dawn was breaking.

The king, with his back to the wall of the hut, was killed by a flying spear. Napo the Dwarf saw it done, and he rushed towards the dead man and wrenched from his brow the golden symbol of sovereignty. Then he

dashed into the hut where the princess Haika sat with her women, and together they placed the crown on her brow, as being the only living child of the royal house. At that moment the hut itself was attacked by Sekonyela; Napo stood forth to defend it with his life; there was a flash of steel and a burst of flame, and he fell forward into a great darkness.

When Napo regained his senses, Sekonyela and the maid were gone.

He lay amidst the blackened ruins of the hut, surrounded in the red light of daybreak by hundreds of grinning corpses, himself burned, covered with blood, and very near to death. He crawled from the place presently to seek water. The fight was over. There was silence about the place. The sun came up and shed his rays over the sloping hill where the dead lay in a mighty silence, and gleamed on prone assegais and battered shields. Those that were left of his people had fled to the bush, and in all that scene of desolation there was only one living thing beside himself. It was Kuena.

Kuena was at death's door, too. He was worn out. He had contrived magic enough in the past week to set up a whole colony of minor wizards. He had fetched out his lightning and opened his thunder-bag, and compounded messes for the doctoring of the king's army against defeat and the doctoring of Sekonyela's against victory, till there was not a single detail of his stock-in-trade left, not even to doctor himself against death, which he knew was very near. All his magic had failed him this time, and he was a broken old man. Moreover, he was grievously wounded by a spear-thrust in the side.

Napo saw him and called his name. He was searching amongst the dead; stumbling about among them, peering into a face here, raising up a corpse there, searching and searching, and so utterly absorbed in what he did that he did not hear that call till it was repeated. Then his sinful old face lit up with a great joy, and he came blindly and hastily to where Napo crouched beside the ruins of the king's hut.

"Is it thou, Napo, my son? I have searched for

thee!" mumbled Kuena, thickly. "Tell me, where is the king?"

"He lies yonder, meat for crows," said Napo, with a heavy heart. "How great slaughter there has been these days! Scarce a man seems living!"

"Only a few, Napo, and they are scattered. But look ye, this is no time for repining. The king is dead, and she that should wear the Golden Glory is gone, for I saw her."

"Then ye saw badly," said Napo, "for, as she went, that Golden Glory was upon her brow. With these hands I placed it there!"

"Ye did well, Napo, so to crown her that our line shall still bear that ancient token of its kingship. But she has gone, and Sekonyela with her."

"Gone! They two together! Gone whither?"

"Nay, I know not where, but I saw them pass by swiftly, as I lay wounded. They must be followed, Napo. She must come back to us, else as a people we shall live no more on the earth. And thou, Napo, must go bring her!"

He spoke thickly, as one hard pressed for breath.

"Listen, Napo. I, who am about to die, command thee to take heed now of that prophecy of the woman who bare thee, and of which I have told so often that it has become a tradition of our people. Go forth and search for her. Follow them wheresoever he may have taken her, and in that hour when thou standest before them face to face, strike the blow that shall perish Sekonyela and all his tribe, and shall restore to us our queen!"

He stopped again, battling for breath, then sank down on his knees. Napo drew near and supported him.

"I die," said Kuena, weakly. "My day is done! Thine is to be!"

He lay silent for a while, as if in thought. Then suddenly he sprang to his feet, erect and rigid as a statue. His arm pointed towards the risen sun. With a loud voice he cried:

"There is a Golden Glory that haunts the dreams of men! Seek for it there, O Napo, where the sun shines and the fields are green! Seek for it as all men seek, for

it is the end and crown of Life and the seal of Happiness! Go now! Delay not! Let that glory be as a star to light thee through battle and disaster, through defeat and victory, through life and, if need be, through death itself, so that in the end——"

And here, with that sentence unfinished, Kuena fell dead.

Napo, wondering at what he said, covered the body, and left it and the place.

And so began the long search which led his feet across half a continent into the Bushman's cave.

CHAPTER IV

How the Dwarf and the Bushman set forth on a great quest; how the liberality of dead men equipped the living for a journey; and how Baroa the Bushman succumbed to an unanswerable argument.

"AND whither now?" asked Baroa the Bushman, when the tale was ended.

"I search in this country," said Napo. "They are here."

"Here! In the snows?"

"Nay, fool! But they have journeyed this way. I have traced them. I found after that day of battle that Sekonyela, gathering the remnants of his people round him, fled southwards in great haste and confusion, bringing her with them. I found, when my pursuit was well begun, that he caught up in the net of his craftiness others whom he encountered by the way, the base-born knaves of certain tribes, scenting plunder. With these he has pressed southwards, hoping to establish himself in some country as a great chief and ruler. Moreover he has given out that Haika, Queen of the Bafokeng, has come with him, to be followed shortly and willingly by her tribe. Thus he seeks for alliances and wins recruits, hoping to make his throne great whereever he establishes it. Perchance he has done so already."

"Not in these parts," said Baroa. "No man of his name and following has come here, nor any woman that answers to your princess."

"Good! Then he is elsewhere to seek—though it may well be that the queen is hid by this low-born villain amongst his own womenkind, lest she should appeal against him for release and succour. This I know, that

Sekonyela passed through the land of Zulu and made obeisance there to the King Chaka. I have but now come from the Zulu, and I was told there of talk between their king and Sekonyela relating to an invasion of this land when the time is opportune."

Baroa grunted.

"If Chaka comes, his armies will eat up the whole land, and Sekonyela with it."

"Mayhap, mayhap. The more reason, then, that I should find my queen before Chaka comes."

"So you would journey forthwith up and down, seeking her."

"For that I came, and I cease not till I find her or find death!"

"Which you nearly found but a few hours ago," said the Bushman, reflectively.

"And which *you* may find yet," said Napo, fingering the borrowed spear, "unless, perchance, we can agree on some share in this enterprise. Look now, Bushman, how I am situated, sore pressed on a great mission in a land that is strange to me. You know that land."

"Every track and gully!" said Baroa. "I and my people are wanderers from birth upwards."

"So! Then a better guide than a Bushman I could not find in a month's journey. Come, therefore, on this quest with me. There will be much to do for your cunning, great fighting, I doubt not, for me, and large store of plunder here and abouts. And if we win out in the end there will be rewards for you—I pledge it—that will make this cave of yours into a king's house for food, raiment and wives!"

The Bushman's eyes glistened like a pig's.

"Food, raiment, beads, and women!" he exclaimed, in an ecstasy of anticipation. "When shall we set forth, Napo?"

"For a while I will rest here," was the reply. "Then we will go down yonder to that kraal where the snows will have melted, and arm ourselves out of Tsotelo's grave. That will be the beginning."

So it was arranged; and one morning, an hour after daybreak, the adventurers fared forth.

The snow had ceased falling several days ago, and the

winter sun streamed down on hill and valley, in a blaze of warmth. The air was sharp, frosty, and invigorating. The wide world, as they gazed across it from the mouth of the Bushman's cave, was a scene of almost dazzling splendour. Round and about them were great ramparts of sun-washed boulders, scarred and riven here, bleached by the sun's rays there, bedded in the unmelted snows yonder, and all gleaming and glorious. Away below them the valley opened up in a vista of blue hazes and great splashes of yellow, where the dried grass clothed the foothills. Beyond that stretched a wonderful panorama of swelling veld, dotted at intervals with trees and intersected here and there by a watercourse. The horizon was bounded by a low line of bluish, mist-wrapped hills, which closed in the view; while over it all arched the immense and unfathomable blue of a sky that had no speck or vestige to break its virginal serenity.

No speck or vestige of cloud, truly! Yet over there, high up in the blue dome, was a little dot, motionless or nearly so. Baroa saw it and pointed.

"Vultures," he said, with a laugh. "They are coming to bury Tsotelo's people."

The two passed out of the cave and began scrambling down the rocks towards the valley.

It was a long descent and a tedious one. The rocks were slippery from the melted snow, and the path so steep in places that the travellers had to go down on all fours, swinging themselves backwards like baboons. But they came at last to the valley, trudged up the slope of the hill on its farther side, and so reached the kraal where a few days earlier Tsotelo lorded it over his people.

Death lay around and about the place. Cattle and goats were stretched out stiff in the pens. Dogs and fowls lay dead in and about the huts, many of which had caved in from the weight of snow that had fallen on them. Not a sign was there of any living thing save that vulture biding its opportunity in the blue overhead. Baroa dropped to his knees and peered into a hut of which half the roof had collapsed.

"Here is Tsotelo," he said laconically. "I know him by that circlet of beads round his middle. He was a rich man."

Napo looked in also. Around the inside of the hut were men, some lying, some sitting, all dead. Their heads lolled at absurd angles, their jaws had dropped as if in fits of laughter, their eyes stared glassily at vacancy, their hands dabbled in the dust as though playing with it. Across the knees of one lay a dog, frozen to death where it had crept for warmth. In the midst of the group was a gourd that had held Tsotelo's beer up to the moment when his frozen fingers refused to grasp it. Then he had thrown himself down on the earthen floor with his mouth to the orifice, and had drank up the dregs, some of which were even now trickling between his mouth and the floor; so that here he lay, dead but still drinking!

Baroa crept into the hut, kicked the gourd from the dead man's lips, and began pulling the corpses this way and that, like so many sacks of corn. They fell here and there, just as he dropped them, stiff as ninepins. From beneath one he drew a blanket, from under another an ox-hide shield. From the waist of a third he tore a rabbit-skin pouch edged with beads, from the stiff arm of a fourth the brass bangles that had been the pride and treasure of their owner in life. Napo, seeing what was afoot, came in to help in the robbery. It was an opportunity for acquiring wealth which might not come to a man twice in a lifetime.

They went through Tsotelo's hut carefully and completely. An auctioneer taking an inventory could not have paid greater attention to details. When they emerged into the open air there was not a vestige of adornment left to console those corpses. They spread out their treasure on a mat, and the Bushman gazed at it with speechless wonder. Eleven brass rings the round of a man's arm; five bead necklets of the width of three fingers each; six sheepskin leglets; one cock's-feather plume which Napo, being the fighting man of the party, appropriated and stuck in his hair, four ox-hide shields; one heavy spear that had belonged to the chief himself, for it was adorned with brass rings and was thus exalted as a sword of state; five assegais and two knob kerries, or throwing-sticks, of black wood, each with brass wire about the haft; seven rush sleeping-mats; six wooden

head-rests; two gourds and a wooden platter; one dead dog with a wire ring round his neck that might purchase ten measures of corn.

Never had Baroa seen such wealth and magnificence as this, all in one dazzling pile. He knew, of course, that some men had waxed fat in women and herds and articles of personal adornment, and were therefore entitled to the respect of the community. He knew that old Tsotelo was reputed to be comfortably beyond the reach of want and not in debt to any large extent in the neighbourhood. But *this!*—beads and brass rings and amulets, weapons of war and skin bags, and gorgeous sleeping-mats that had obviously not been in use for more than a generation and were therefore as good as new! No, it was scarcely credible that all these had belonged to one being. Napo, who had lived with the wealthiest man of his tribe, was not so extravagant in his exclamations of delight.

"Maybe there is plunder in the other huts," he said carelessly. "Leave these trifles here while we search. The dog will guard them."

The dog, being as far gone as last summer, was not likely to abandon his charge, so they left him there. They went through every hut, and there were more than a hundred. It was a disagreeable task turning over all the corpses that crowded around the walls, and searching about amongst dead men for the pitiful belongings which these people in their simplicity regarded as the world's riches. Properly speaking, Napo at least should not have touched a single corpse. The customs, religion, and traditions of his tribe, and of almost every other black tribe from the Nile to the southern sea, were violated every time he did it, unless he could secure purification afterwards. But in the course of his lonely and homeless wanderings across leagues of the Dark Continent, this child of Nature was forced so often to surrender himself to circumstances that he was now case-hardened. The first time he broke an immemorial custom was when he killed and ate a snake, to avert starvation, and fully expected the heavens to open immediately thereafter and deluge him with thunderbolts. In fact, he was so sure of the consequences

that he lay up in that neighbourhood for two days in a place of shelter beneath the rocks, hoping by good luck to dodge some of the lightning when it came. But there happened to be a drought in that locality, and the storm stayed away. Napo was driven forth from his hiding-place, not by the vengeance of his ancestral spirits, but by the pangs of hunger; and, though he ate no more snake-meat on that journey but subsisted on roots till he came to a land of plenty, his faith in the retribution of heaven was somewhat shaken by the incident. Since then he had been forced to violate his religious beliefs on other occasions, and had done so with such conspicuous profit to himself as to make him almost suppose those beliefs were invented with the object, principally, of sustaining the populace in the virtue of poverty.

Baroa, on the contrary, had no scruples, no ancestral spirits to worry about, and no religion at all except the worship of the praying mantis and the new moon. He would caterwaul to that luminary for six nights in succession and get drunk every night if he could; but beyond these periodical exercises his religious observances never extended. As for the handling of a dead body, he would sooner that than handle a live one when he was after loot, because a dead man could not hit back.

But the task these two had set themselves resulted in few finds after the chief's hut was scooped clean of its contents. Brass rings and beads they discovered, and some blankets, and of course spears and assegais so many they could not hope to carry them all away. But they took each a spear, a bundle of six assegais bound with thongs, an ox-hide shield, and a short-handled knob kerrie. Then two bundles were made up of sleeping-mats, each containing the beads, brass rings, and other articles of commerce, the uses of which would prove to be numerous and peculiar in that land.

Thus equipped, the travellers set out from Tsotelo's kraal richer than when they reached it. As they swung down the sunlit hillside towards the valley the vulture which had hovered overhead gave his mysterious signal to the waiting legions of his kind, and soon the trail of death lay out on the summer sky in a stream of slowly

flapping wings and craning heads that stretched as far as the eye could see.

It was noon when the twain came to the stream down in the valley. Here they found a resting-place under a clump of thorn-trees. Baroa produced flint and tinder from one of the pouches at his side, and from another strips of goat's-flesh. When the fire was made they roasted the flesh, and fared sumptuously.

They talked, too. They talked over the events of the morning, with much sage moralising on the fate which had overtaken Tsotelo's people. Baroa saw in it the hand of justice, in that this man, puffed up with pride because of his possessions, had become so mercenary and grasping that even the theft of one goat led to an excess of rage and vindictiveness. Witness the price put on the head of Baroa, who had taken that goat merely because the animal was so beggared of all wisdom as to walk straight into a trap he had fashioned down by the river drift. Since it had been visited with that penalty for its foolishness what man would have left the carcase behind to bear witness to the folly of goats? There was no keeping goats out of the traps, as every man well knew; notwithstanding he gave his whole time to so doing he would be defeated. And if any saw him, Baroa, going from that place with the goat on his back, and ran forthwith to the chief with a great story of the occasion, upon whom lay the fault therefor save on such low-born knave as uttered this shameful perversion? Hence, without doubt, Tsotelo being given over to unreasoning fury and drunk half his time, justice, though bearing with him long, had wearied of so great a beast and monster, and unquestionably, because of this act of vindictiveness, had caused him and his people to perish utterly from the earth. Wherefore——

"Peace, fool!" exclaimed Napo. "'Twas no justice in your cause, but certainly an interposition of the spirits that by these means, having escaped the White Death on the mountain, I might the better equip me for that mission which brings me to this land. This seems to be without question."

Baroa, from being the essential instigator of the judg-

ment upon Tsotelo, saw his glory suddenly expire, and resented it.

"Dwarf," he asked, "whose feet travelled first to the chief's hut, mine or thine?"

"Thine."

"Good. And whose hands grasped the first spear, found the first necklet, brought forth the first beads, discovered in truth all this hoard of riches we now have strapped on our backs?"

"Thine, surely."

"Then, Dwarf, of a truth on my behalf has all this fallen out as it has befallen. Now answer me further. To whom belongs that which his eyes discover and his hands seize? Answer me, Napo!"

"As to that," said Napo, "one question begets another. Whose arms are the stronger, whose girth the greater, whose body the larger, whose strength that of a wild bull and whose that of a starved jackal? Come! —we are both armed—take this spear and this shield, and I will take an assegai—nay, I will take only a stick! —and we will decide this question. Then, perchance, you may shortly be with Tsotelo himself, disputing about that goat!"

Baroa looked at the massive proportions of the Dwarf, and decided that the argument just advanced was so logically sound as to permit of no further discussion.

CHAPTER V

Tells of the beginning of a long journey; of a land infested by robbers; of a great fight that was without issue; and how the Dwarf, having found a jackal in a cave, discovers a lion on a hill.

In the late afternoon the twain set forth again upon their journey, Baroa knew of a small collection of reed huts not many miles distant, where they might obtain shelter for the night. It was inhabited by the three drovers that looked after the cattle of Kolwane on this outskirt of his domain. Kolwane was chieftain over a small tribe which had seceded some few years earlier from Tsotelo, and no love was lost between the two people. Baroa considered some profit might accrue from carrying the good news about the snowstorm.

While the hours of daylight lasted the travellers kept mainly to the river's bed to avoid being seen. All about that country bands were wandering up and down, pillaging and destroying, the strong preying on the weak, and the weak squabbling among themselves. It was a period, destined to last for a generation, of civil war and red murder. From north, east, and north-east there came pouring into the land at this time the remnants of scattered tribes; some that had been overthrown by Chaka, then at the zenith of his power, others that had fought amongst themselves and split up in warring factions, others again that were pressing southward from the great territories of the north in search of new habitations, more plunder, and fresh conquests. The country, which is now called Basutoland, had no name nor any visible authority. Its original inhabitants, few in number, found themselves attacked, dispersed, absorbed; broken into innumerable clans; drifting hither and thither on the tide of migration as it flowed this way

and that about the country. There was nowhere in the land either security of tenure or permanence of residence. The chief who set himself up with his people as lord of a rich valley to-day, found himself attacked, beaten, and beggared of everything to-morrow. His successor held to the territory for just so long as a stronger man kept clear of it. Might was right, and the devil took the hindmost.

Thieves, murderers, and cannibals roamed everywhere. They had their lairs in the valleys, especially at the river-drifts, and their caves in the mountains. They plundered and slew; and often, when they had slit a man's throat and robbed him, they sat down and finished the job by eating him. It was not a nice country in which to spend a holiday, and nobody came there with that object. Moreover, in those years of its early history famine and pestilence stalked through it. Smallpox slew thousands; hunger slew many more; and of those that were left tens of thousands perished by the spear.

No wonder our travellers walked warily. Baroa said that most certainly, were they captured with all that treasure upon them, they would be first robbed and then slain. He spoke truer than he knew, for in point of fact they came near to meeting this very fate before that day's sun went down.

They had left the river's bed and were travelling along the brow of a low hill, Baroa shading his eyes from the sun's rays and searching the valley for signs of the drovers' huts.

"Yonder," he said, "are the cattle. See—near to those burnt thorns. And there are the drovers of Kolwane behind them."

Napo looked too. It seemed to him there were many drovers for so small a herd, and he was about to say so. But he looked again and saw that he was mistaken. The cattle, to the number of twenty head, were coming across the depression below them, and behind them were three men. As they drew nearer it was seen that the drovers were armed only with sticks.

"One of these men is known to me," said Baroa. "He is named Ketla, and in his hut we shall sleep to-night."

They swung down the hillside at a good pace. Cattle and men dipped down into the folds of the valley and disappeared from view. There were thorn-bushes and some stunted trees in the intervening space, so that neither Napo nor the Bushman was aware that the moment they went down into the valley those cattle were turned about and driven off, and that from the midst of them four men emerged, armed one with spear and shield and the rest with assegais. On the crest of a little rise Baroa paused and looked again. Nothing was to be seen.

"Strange, Dwarf, where these men can be, unless they are driving the cattle in the donga."

"The cattle are there, going back to the huts," said Napo. "There were three drovers, and now I see but one."

"Perchance they have seen us and are waiting."

But Baroa was wrong. They had been seen truly, but the drovers were not waiting. They were coming swiftly and stealthily along the donga, hidden from view by the broken ground and the thorn-trees. They ran almost on hands and knees, bounding along like dogs: ran round the little eminence on which the traveller stood and, with a yell, came at them from behind. The travellers swung round at the same instant, and the two men faced the four.

If ever an unequal contest might have appealed to the sporting instincts of man, and secured for two of the combatants some levelling of odds, this was one. The four strangers were big men, one literally a giant, for he towered a good head and shoulders above his companions. Their antagonists were so small as to seem children by contrast: the Bushman crouching cat-like behind a shield as long as his own body, and the Dwarf poising a spear so big he might have used it as a vaulting pole, had he known how. Apparently some glimmering idea of the incongruity of a fight on such unequal terms struck the mind of the giant, though if it did so it vanished very soon after. He looked down from his tremendous height with the contempt of a St Bernard dog observing two kittens.

"Hold!" he cried, before assegai could be thrown

or spear thrust. "Are we to fight with baboon and monkey?"—and he laughed scornfully. "Who are ye, and whence come ye?"

"For that we answer to no man!" said Napo boldly. "We would pass yonder to the drovers of Kolwane, with one of whom we would have speech."

"Then ye will find him hard of hearing," said the giant, "for the three lie dead in the hut where we left them. The cattle that were Kolwane's are ours now, and if those things that you carry on your backs be gifts for that chief, you had best make shift to let us carry them, you being weaklings."

He swaggered a step forward and the other men laughed. Baroa the Bushman, being, like all his tribe, a fighter only when he could strike unseen from behind cover, shrank back, and the men laughed again. But Napo frowned angrily.

"As ye laugh now so ye will stretch your great mouths for the last time shortly," he said. "Come not a step nearer, giant, else will you see that though small I have a strong arm and a straight thrust for robbers."

"Fool!" said the giant with a grunt. "If you have mind to try your strength, let it be so. Yes, and that monkey with you. Come both, and I will spit you on this spear."

"Nay," said Napo. "Let the four of you come and I will fight singly, and if any lives after, this monkey shall have his turn."

At this there was a shout of laughter. One of the men, advancing, said with a grin:

"Peace, children or apes or whatever ye be. We waste time talking. Give us that which ye carry and begone, or answer to me for it."

That he did not expect the answer he got, and got so promptly with no further words, was shown by the suddenness with which he went down dead, under one furious thrust of Napo's spear. The grin was still on his face as he fell backwards, stabbed through the heart. There were three left now—three amazed and furious assailants, who gave one gasp of astonished rage and then came on without another word. Then ensued a combat that was Homeric and bloody.

Baroa, outside the whirl of stabbing spears, watched fascinated. He saw the great shield raised and lowered before Napo's body with the rapidity of lightning: raised to parry a blow, lowered in the delivery of one, raised again to catch the full thrust of a spear aimed high, lowered to stop an assegai-stab at body and legs. It was a wonderful performance, of which Baroa had never seen the like for cleverness and dexterity. The three strangers attacked with the fury of beasts, so that the shield of Napo rang with a very hail of blows. But they never seemed able to touch the man behind the shield. One, it is true, grazed him slightly above the knee; but that man dropped his spear a second later, and went reeling from a thrust in the forearm. At the same instant Napo delivered a lunge at another of his assailants, and caught him fairly in the neck. Blood gushed out in a spouting stream, and that man crashed down dead on the body of his companion.

All this had happened in the space of seconds only. Two were dead, and one out of the fight with a wound which would keep him in the bush like a sick dog for a week at least. The giant alone was left. Even he was bleeding from a dozen thrusts.

"This Napo is no man, he is a devil!" thought the astonished Bushman. "Nevertheless, he might stumble, or misheed a blow, and so be slain."

Accordingly Baroa, who had been crouching in the shelter of a thorn-bush, slipped from his cover and like a flash got himself behind the giant, with one of his assegais ready for a throw. Another second would probably have ended the career of the giant then and there, had not Napo at that moment seen what was afoot and given the Bushman a further example of his fighting instincts as novel in that country as it was chivalrous.

"Cease!" he cried in a loud voice, and lowered his spear.

The giant, in the act of thrusting at his opponent, caught Napo with his spear-head upon the shoulder and drew blood.

"Cease!" cried Napo, for the second time, and so fiercely that the Bushman stayed his hand.

The two combatants lowered their weapons, the giant,

sore pressed as he was, puzzled at victory being thus unexpectedly accorded him. He shook his great head, about which the blood poured in streams, and said with a savage laugh:

"Yield then, Baboon, after so good a fight, and you shall go with your life. Yield not and I slay you."

"Nay, I yield not to you or to any man," said Napo panting. "I cried 'Cease!' so that this fight instead of being ended might go on, for you are a fighter after my own heart. Look behind you, giant!"

The man turned, and there stood Baroa with his assegai still poised for the fatal stab.

"Had I not stayed him," said Napo, "you would have been dead not by my hand but by his. Methought so good a fighter deserved better than to fall from a blow behind! Come, now, begin again!"

The giant wiped the blood from his face with his hand, looked again at the Bushman, then at the Dwarf curiously, and leaned on the handle of his spear.

"Whence come ye, Dwarf?" he asked briefly.

"From a country where baboons fight like men," said Napo, with a laugh.

"I am Keshwan, called the Giant," said the other. He drew himself up to the fullness of his enormous height, and stood there gazing silently for a moment. Then:

"In that land whence you come, O Dwarf," he said, "they fight well and fairly. Better that two such should fight side by side than face to face."

He threw down his shield and spear as a sign that the fight was over.

"Hearken," he said again. "I yield not to you nor you to me. The fight has no issue as it stands, save that you withstood four men, killing two and sorely wounding one. This monkey of yours should have killed him, too. As for these hurts of mine," and he wiped the blood from his chest and arms, "they are but scratches, like that on your shoulder, and will soon heal. Therefore in this we are equal, and the fight has no issue."

"That is well said," answered Napo, "save that this hurt you have given me is greater than those scratches I

have given you. Therefore is the honour on your side as between the two of us, leaving those that are dead to settle the question for themselves."

"Good," said Keshwan. "And now, Dwarf, if you want for a strong friend and a good fighter, to go whither you go and to fare with you, I that am called Keshwan the Giant am willing. Yet if you wish for the fight to continue, so that one of us be slain here, and good blood be spilled to no purpose, I Keshwan the Giant am willing for that, too. Choose!"

Napo the Dwarf held out the little finger of his right hand and the Giant touched it with his own.

"In that cave yonder," said Napo, "I picked up a jackal, and here on this hill I find a lion! Let it be as you say, Giant. Strength, size and cunning may do much in that quest which brings me hither, and mayhap the Dwarf, the Giant, and the Bushman will be heard of in this land!"

CHAPTER VI

Describes how the travellers made a virtue of necessity; how such virtue met with a poor reward; how three prisoners came to the kraal of Kolwane; and how Keshwan the Giant told a big story

DARKNESS was falling when the travellers reached the hut of Kolwane's drovers.

"They are in there," said Keshwan with a shrug.

One of the huts stood a little apart, and Napo peered into it. The darkness of its interior was made darker, so to speak, in that corner where the three corpses lay huddled among their mats.

"They had been drinking beer," said Keshwan. "We came upon them suddenly, the four of us. But it was not a man's business. Those dogs whom you slew did it."

"Where is the beer?" asked Baroa thirstily.

"We drank it. That man whom the Dwarf pricked in the arm had most of it, and doubtless he bleeds beer at this moment!"

"There will be an ado with Kolwane because of this," said Napo reflectively.

"Of that there can be no doubt whatever," said Keshwan. "When his drovers return not, he will send for them—probably to-morrow. By that time we shall be far on our journey."

"Nay," said the Bushman, cunningly. "I bethink me of a better plan than to fly from Kolwane, and perchance be overtaken and slain because of a deed two of us at least did not commit. If we go to him of our own accord, returning his cattle to him, there may be some profit for us. Where are the cattle?"

"They will be hereabout in the thorns," said the

Giant. "We purposed to drive them off had we not encountered you, Monkey and Dwarf, yonder. Some there are will be sorry they went not with the cattle instead of hurrying hence on the Dwarf's spear. Nevertheless it seems a pity to return these cattle now that we have them."

"They who drive cattle travel slowly," said the Dwarf. "Most certainly Kolwane would overtake us, whereupon we might lose our lives and the cattle too."

"That is so," said the Bushman. "Better for us to sleep here in one of these huts and at dawn go with the cattle to Kolwane's kraal, which is three hours' march from here. There we shall deliver up the cattle, telling Kolwane that while we rested with the drover Ketla and his companions we were attacked by robbers. The drovers they killed, but we three escaped to the hill yonder. There we fought with and dispersed the robbers, slaying some of their number, and being sore hurt, to save Kolwane's herds. Delivering to him his cattle, we shall claim reward."

Thus it was agreed, and the three adventurers accordingly set out to search amongst the stunted thorns, where, not far from the scene of the murder, they found the cattle browsing quietly and drove them in.

"Three head are missing," said Keshwan, when the cattle were assembled. "Doubtless they are grazing near by, and we shall find them in the morning."

"And when we do so," said the Bushman, "we shall first drive them to a hidden place in the valley and tether them to a tree. Then, when we have delivered the rest of the cattle to Kolwane, telling how these three were driven away by the robbers, we shall return here and take them on our journey with us."

"Thus shall we be twice rewarded," said Keshwan approvingly. "This Kolwane, is he liberal in his payment for a service?"

"That I know not," said Baroa; "but if he knew you were of the party that slew his drovers he would be liberal enough with you!"

"And if he knew you planned and contrived for the stealing of three of his cattle there would doubtless be little stint in your reward, either," laughed the Giant.

"And, as he will know neither of these things, we will leave his kraal richer than when we came to it," rejoined the Bushman.

With that the three adventurers left the cattle in one of the small enclosures near the huts, crawled inside one of those dingy and evil-smelling abodes, and, after partaking of a little food they found there, proceeded to make themselves comfortable. By a most fortunate dispensation of Providence the nose of a black man is impervious to unpleasing odours. The skin of a black man is similarly impervious to fleas, wood-lice, ants, and travelling beetles with a taste for exploration. Consequently the travellers slept on till near the dawn, entirely undisturbed by the presence in large numbers of these agile and interesting insects. But that their sleep was not to be unbroken by unwelcome intruders was proved just as the sun was beginning to show itself over the hills and chase the shadows along the valleys.

Keshwan it was that awoke first. He woke with a start, reached out for his spear, sat bolt upright and listened. Outside near the door of the hut he heard first steps, then voices.

"Where is that dog Ketla?" someone was asking crossly.

"They sleep like the dead!" growled another. "Thrust in the door with your spear and call them."

There was a sound of battering on the reeds of the next hut.

"Ketla, awaken, fool!" came the first voice. Then the door went down with a crackle of split reeds.

"The hut is empty," said the same voice.

"Here are the cattle," cried the other, from a little distance. "Robbers might well have stolen them while these dogs slept!"

Keshwan heard other footsteps approaching and voices calling.

"Awaken!" he cried in a whisper, shaking the Dwarf roughly. "Awaken, Bushman! Kolwane's soldiers are here searching the huts!"

The Dwarf and the Bushman, being accustomed to sudden alarms, and being light sleepers in consequence, were wide awake in an instant.

"Hark!" said the Giant.

There was a shout from the hut where the murdered drovers lay. "They are here, behold them, Lithaka, their throats slit, every one! Who can have done this deed?"

Then followed a confusion of voices, broken upon by the trampling of feet and the lowing of the kine. Baroa crept to the door of the hut and opened it cautiously. The next second the three adventurers sprang out—and would have given their lives for it but for the promptness of Keshwan.

"Hold!" he cried, as a dozen assegais were levelled at them. "We are not slayers, we are defenders. Take us to Kolwane's kraal that we may be judged there."

"Cast down your weapons and we take you," said the man named Lithaka, who was in charge of the searchers.

At a signal from Keshwan the three did so.

"We perceive that the chief's cattle are here," the man went on. "Yet it was doubtless your intention to depart with them at sun-up, having slain the drovers. To this ye shall make answer before Kolwane."

"To that we shall make answer now," began Napo, when Keshwan stopped him.

"Nay," he said. "Who are these that we should reason with them? We are guiltless, and our proof shall be for the master, not for the servants."

"Then we had better get hence quickly," said Lithaka, "for already the chief murmurs that neither his herds nor his drovers have returned to the kraal, which they should have done last night."

With that soldiers, to the number of about a dozen, closed in round the three travellers, while others released the cattle and prepared to drive them to Kolwane's kraal.

"Here is some small change in your plans, Bushman," said the Giant, glumly. "Instead of going to Kolwane's kraal for honourable reward we are taken there prisoners."

"And have already lost all such belongings as we found in Tsotelo's huts," said the Dwarf. A man had collected together the whole of their valuable possessions and was marching off with them. Presently a

procession was formed, with the prisoners in the middle of it and the cattle in front. Behind came bearers carrying the three bodies.

"Kolwane is a just man," said the Bushman, as they trudged off.

"If we had arms," said the Dwarf, under his breath, "I would be for a dash through these soldiers rather than trust to the justice of any man."

"And, being without arms, our legs are of no account either," said the Bushman, sagely.

"Of what grade were these men whom the robbers slew?" asked Keshwan, aloud.

"These men whom ye slew," said Lithaka, pointedly, "were two of them young sons of the chief's uncle, Hashla, and one a cousin to Sesuka, the witch-doctor of Kolwane's kraal."

"Then there will be great ado about the matter," said Keshwan. "Better for you, perhaps, to send forward a messenger to tell Kolwane, and let us all now go in search of the robbers."

"As to that," replied Lithaka, meaningly, "we would not need to go far, as perchance Kolwane will tell you."

"I perceive that you are of a low understanding," said Keshwan, virtuously, "and since you believe that we slew the drovers we shall say no more, trusting to the justice and wisdom of Kolwane."

"Whereon you may rely, truly," said Lithaka, with a smile, "for a wiser in the discovery of liars and a juster in punishing the same you will not find in this land."

They trudged on in silence after this. They were passing along a fertile valley, of which the far side rose gradually in a series of grassy terraces studded with small trees. There was little enough sign of habitation, for the country in that part was sparsely populated. Now and again they passed herds driving a few of Kolwane's goats or cows to pasturage. These people shouted across the valley for the news, and the soldiers shouted back, telling them about the murder. Their voices carried great distances, and those hearing of a thing called it aloud to someone else farther along. In this way news travelled quickly from kraal to kraal, so

that people became informed even about small occurrences with marvellous rapidity. Kolwane's kraal knew of the murder long before the procession arrived there, and was thoroughly convinced that the three travellers had perpetrated it. If they had not done so, why should they be prisoners?—which line of argument is not unknown in establishing a man's guilt even in civilised countries.

The valley through which they were walking was in Kolwane's territory as to its lower end, and as to the upper had been lorded over by Tsotelo before the snowstorm. Even in these parts traces were to be seen of that visitation. The rivulets were full of ice-cold water which had come down from the snows on the Drakensberg. The tempest that had swept down the valley had levelled some of the trees; and here and there were carcases of sheep lost in the storm and frozen to death. These the soldiers took with them to the kraal.

The procession came to the head of the valley after a time, and began climbing up one of those green terraces where the dew lay on the grass as heavily as rain.

The sun was high in the heavens when they reached the kraal. In that part of the country it was a town of some pretensions, for it harboured a thousand people. It was situated on the bare slope of a very steep hill. At the foot of the hill rough stones had been piled up in a sort of breastwork stretching along parallel with a trickling watercourse. Behind the stones were the cattle-kraals, thus rendered more secure from attack by marauding bands. Up the slope of the hill a few huts straggled to the kraal fence, a large enclosure of thorn-bush interlaced with reeds. Inside this protecting wall were groups of reed-huts arranged in semicircular formation, the centre hut, which was also the largest, being that of Kolwane.

Before it was the *lekhotla*, or open place, grassless and beaten flat, in the centre of which was an acacia-tree. Beneath this tree Kolwane dispensed injustice and granted audiences to such as were permitted to approach his august person. He was a large, fat, and pompous individual, with a double chin and three stomachs, and was of such girth about the middle that he walked with

difficulty. When he did pursue an ambling course about his domain, which was seldom, he looked like a jellyfish and smelt like a catfish. But nobody noticed this latter eccentricity or paid him any special respect because of it. In that land everybody smelt more or less. Everybody was greasy and smeared with fats, so that what with fat and dust and dirt distributed with great prodigality about the person it was sometimes difficult to say just where a man's covering ended and a man began.

Word of the travellers' coming, and of what was toward therewith, had reached the kraal, and when the party arrived in front of the chief's hut, the chief himself was seated beneath the tree and the whole of the available population was massed around. The three adventurers were brought forward with no more ado. But the bodies of the drovers were carried elsewhere, because it was against the etiquette of this tribe that the chief should look on the dead. If he did so by any chance he must undergo great doctorings and a tiresome ceremony of purification, otherwise he would be dead within a year. But if the corpse was that of his own son he might look on it, provided the hands were covered; otherwise he would be dead within two years. That this was perfectly true was proved by the fact that many people that had looked on corpses had died within the stipulated period.

"Hail, chief!" cried Litlĭaka, saluting. "We bring thy cattle with us, but Ketla and the two with him sleep still. These whom we found near the bodies shall answer for it."

"Ay, O chief!" cried the Giant, stepping forward as spokesman for the party. "For that, and for the safety of thy cattle, and for our presence here somewhat earlier than we had thought, are we prepared to answer."

Then, in noble but simple language, he told the story. He described how he and the Bushman and the Dwarf, being friends of the lamented Ketla, called upon that personage in the early afternoon of the day previous; how Ketla, to celebrate the occasion, broached his beer; how the whole party made merry and in the midst of it were attacked by a band of robbers. There may have

been ten—nay, he was mistaken, he himself counted fifteen. There were fifteen robbers, who without warning set upon the hut and would have slain them all. But, by good fortune and by great heroism on their part, they escaped and ran to a hill near by; and here they were beset forthwith by these twenty robbers, and there was great combat. He told in dignified and modest phrases how the attack was repulsed with slaughter. How he, Keshwan, himself slew seven of those twenty-five robbers. How Napo slew two and wounded a dozen. How the Bushman cast assegais thick as leaves, till the sky was dark with them, so that they three kept those thirty robbers at bay till the going down of the sun, and routed them. How then, seeing the case was hopeless, the thirty-five robbers fled, bearing their dead with them, save and except the twain that the Dwarf slew, who fell under Keshwan's own feet and could not be extricated. How, after the fight, though sore wounded—as witness the scars of Keshwan and the cut shoulder of the Dwarf—they three returned to the drovers' huts, seeking to restore to them the cattle, and found them dead with their throats cut. And how thereafter, having great respect, fear, and reverence for the chief, Kolwane, the fame of whose deeds had spread everywhere throughout the land as an example for the brave and a terror to evil-doers, they, the three of them, to wit, himself, Keshwan, the Dwarf Napo, and this Bushman——

"Peace from this chattering!" shouted Kolwane, in sudden rage. "How know we not that ye lie, and have yourselves done this deed? Where lie the bodies of these ye slew?"

"They lie there on the hill where we fought with them," said Keshwan. "Send thy dog Lithaka, and let him fetch them hither in his mouth."

Lithaka, who was tired from his journey to the drovers' huts and back, demurred.

"Why did not this boaster tell me, O chief, that I might have seen these bodies where they lay before returning here?"

"I told not because you are but a servant of this mighty master, to whom I have made report direct."

"Then, O chief," replied Lithaka, "if I go thither

again, let this boaster come with me; then if there be no proof there of his story I may slay him forthwith and trouble thee no more with the matter."

"Go," said the chief, "and take him with thee, and take bearers to bring in these bodies if they are there. If there are no bodies bring this boaster to me that I may slay him here, first cutting his tongue out. As for these that are with him, the Baboon and the Monkey, they shall await him, and if it is proved that he lies they shall die too."

Lithaka, furious at having to march again, stalked off fuming, followed by Keshwan and a small company of soldiers. Napo and the Bushman watched them go rather uneasily, and hoped no prowling jackals had dragged off and devoured the corpses during the night. But they had little opportunity just then for speculation. The old chief had made a motion with his hand, had risen, and was waddling towards his hut. Two men thereupon laid hold upon the Dwarf, and two upon the Bushman, and hustled them to a hut near by.

"Wait here till Lithaka returns," said one of the men, and pushed them in. The reed door of the hut was closed on them, and they found themselves alone.

CHAPTER VII

Sets forth the justice, mercy and loving-kindness of Kolwane; describes a great dreamer of dreams; shows how visions may be made profitable; and leaves the three travellers in an unexpected predicament.

"I LIKE not the look of that pot-bellied swine," said Baroa, glumly.

"Nevertheless your wisdom has brought us to this pass, Bushman, else had we fled from those accursed huts of the drovers and been far on our way by now."

"It avails little to chide me for that," said Baroa; "the matter that concerns us now is to get hence with our lives, if the bodies of those dogs you slew cannot be found."

"If that befalls," said Napo, "we shall not get hence without a fight which will put yesterday's combat beneath the boasting even of long-legged fools."

Baroa glanced round the hut, then crawled round it, examining its walls carefully. It seemed to be stoutly built, but a few minutes' investigation showed that one edge of it rested on a patch of sand. Baroa scratched with his finger-nails.

"There is soft earth here," he said. "If we had a spear or an assegai we might dig."

"Dig a hole to bury ourselves in?" suggested Napo. "Of what avail for rats to creep from their holes with a thousand dogs on the watch for them?"

"Nay, I bethought me of the night-time," said Baroa. "It will be near sundown before Keshwan is back, and Kolwane will be drunk by then. So, whatever has befallen, judgment will not be given against us till morning. Now if we had a spear——"

The door of the hut opened and one of their captors crawled in. He was a thick-set, evil-looking fellow.

"I am bidden by the chief to bring you food and a little drink," he said. "You are travellers and the chief's guests, till such time as you are proved to be the slayers of his herdmen."

"And then?" asked Napo. "Of what like is your chief? Is he a just man?"

The soldier took a drink of the beer and a bite of the food he had brought, to show that the same was not poisoned.

"That he is just, this food showeth; that he is merciful shall be proved by his judgment when ye come before him for trial."

"In what manner does he deal with the guilty?" asked Napo.

"As to that," said the soldier, "he hath ways of great efficacy and of his own devising, for in the invention of just but merciful punishments he hath not his equal in the land."

"Stripes, possibly?" suggested Napo.

"Stripes, yes," laughed the soldier—"for children and women when they need them. I have seen them laid on the bare back with his own hand till a woman was like to die—and did die before morning—but she deserved it. Passing before the chief's mat, as he sat in audience, this woman upset his beer."

"And you call that *mercy*?" exclaimed Napo.

"Well, mayhap it would have been the kindlier to that woman to have cut from her the hand that did it and let her go. He hath done that on occasions. But usually for simple offences he gives a flogging."

"Then what gives he for offences that are bold and complicated?" asked Napo, swallowing hard.

"Such, for example, as the slaying of his drovers, so be it is proved against a man?" suggested Baroa.

"Well, for an offence so grave as that he might devise a special punishment. But he would be merciful."

"How merciful?"

"First he would feed and well entreat those that were condemned——"

Napo and the Bushman looked sourly at the food before them.

"——and he would give them to drink from his own gourd. Then, if there was more than one man concerned in the thing, he might enjoin them severally to make sport for his warriors."

"Ha!" exclaimed Napo. "There is mercy in that, truly! Those that were condemned might die fighting."

"Nay, you misheed me. He would first cause them to be fastened with thongs and their eyes bandaged. Then would he place them severally against that tree in front of the hut there, and order that the young lads practise with assegais against them as a target, five throws to each boy. Sometimes have I seen a man killed at the tenth throw, but more often there are an hundred throws. The boys throw not to kill but to strike only, it being accounted more skilful to draw blood with each throw of an hundred than to kill in the first five. Now in your case——"

"But in this throwing, what weapon shall the condemned use, and how many shall be his throws?"

"Nay, I have already said the condemned shall be fastened. He shall have no throws. Now in your case, you being small and offering less target than some, it might be that even the most skilful would slay you sooner than that giant that came with you, whose body is larger. Methinks you and this monkey here——"

"If this trussing of men to be slain piecemeal shows the justice and mercy of your chief——" broke in the Dwarf, licking his dry lips.

"It is just, most truly," pursued the soldier; "for in all lands the condemned must die, and here our youths are enabled, in the killing of them, to acquire great facility in the use of weapons. An account is kept in the throwing whereby he that shows cleverness above the rest is rewarded. That there is justice in this no person can deny. Now, as I was saying"—he carefully scrutinised the bodily proportions of the captives—"methinks you and this monkey here would hardly outlast an hundred throws between you; whereas the

Giant might well outlive an hour of the sport, and perhaps afterwards be roasted."

"Roasted!"

"Nay, not roasted, as you think, on a fire. It is but a saying amongst us."

"Tell on," said Napo, with a gulp. "We would hear more of the ways of this merciful and gentle chief. When a man is smitten by an hundred assegais, if he still liveth he is roasted?"

"So, in our manner of speaking. He is carried to the back of the cattle-kraals, where there are ant-heaps, and made fast to one of them. First he is smeared with honey."

"There is great mercy in that, I clearly perceive," said Napo. "These ants being starved, the honey is supplied to sweeten their meal off the man."

"Even so. But sometimes——"

"Enough!" said Napo. "It is proved to us that the most just, merciful, and kind of all chiefs is this of yours, though I pray we may have no need of his mercy. Now leave us to rest here against the time when Keshwan returns."

During this conversation the Bushman, though a listener, had not been idle. A born thief, and as cunning as a fox, he has espied, the moment the soldier entered, that he carried an assegai, and, a moment later, that he deposited it against the side of the hut near the door while he distributed the food. A little manœuvring on Baroa's part brought him within an arm's-length of the assegai. While Napo and the soldier were consuming the beer between them, Baroa quietly hid the assegai beneath a reed-mat, and, as luck would have it, the soldier left the hut, carrying the platters and the gourd, ignorant of his loss. But that he would miss the weapon soon was a certainty.

"Quick! Dig with this assegai! My nails are sharp!" commanded Baroa, in a whisper, as the man went out.

In a fury of haste the two dug in that patch of soft earth till the hand of a man might have been put through under the hut with ease.

"Now we shall be able to root up this side of the hut

if need be," said Napo. At the same moment a step was heard outside. Instantly a mat was drawn over the hole and the surrounding earth. But there was no time to hide the assegai. Napo was holding it across his knees when the soldier crept in.

"Here is the weapon you seek," he said, carelessly. "It was left by the door. We were thinking whether 'twere not better to partake of your chief's mercy at one blow and be finished with it!"

The soldier laughed at the jest, took his assegai, and withdrew.

It was late afternoon when a shrill screaming of little boys down by the cattle-enclosures announced that something was afoot. It was followed by the hurrying of feet round and about the hut, a great babel of excited voices, and the congregation of men and women in large numbers. Lithaka and his party had returned. A few moments afterwards the same soldier that had brought their food summoned the prisoners to the chief's presence. As Baroa had predicted, by this time he was pretty drunk, and in a roaring temper.

Kolwane was seated as before under the acacia, and the population of the kraal was gathered around the *lekhotla*, or place of audience. Next to the chief, cocooned to the chin in a disreputable straw-mat, crouched the *ngaka*, or doctor of the tribe. He was a hideous old man, with white wool about his ears and a split lip which displayed his upper teeth and made him grin all the time, though not pleasantly. The Bushman, who knew him by repute, shivered when he saw him. About his neck was a string of bladders, and round about his loins was a special assortment of skin-bags and bullock's bones, these being the stock-in-trade of the native magician. When he moved, the bones and the bladders rattled like peas in a dry pod. But they were not visible until he divested himself of his mat, which he presently did.

This old man, Sesuka by name, was a specialist in visions. Nothing ever happened in that country but he had a dream about it. He always dreamt about it after it had happened. Of course he said he had dreamt of it before, but he never told about a dream till afterwards,

which showed his good sense. However, the people took no stock in probabilities. When a man was a witch-doctor he had to be believed, no matter what he said, because it was universally admitted that a witch-doctor knew everything. And, in any case, Sesuka had managed to get up some really able and convincing visions in his time. He dreamt that the chief's son would be gored to death by a bull, and it happened exactly as he dreamt it, because he told about it, down to the smallest detail, after the body was brought in and he had heard all the particulars privately. He dreamt there would be a flood and one end of the cattle-kraal would be swept away; and this was proved to be a good dream, because on the morning when the river began to rise he asked that the cattle should be removed, and they were and were saved in consequence; and later, when the kraal was washed out, he modestly confessed that he had dreamt it all and had asked for the cattle to be removed for that reason. There were hundreds of such examples of his power.

People would come to Sesuka from all parts to have their dreams interpreted; for he could interpret the dreams of others. And of course he charged something for doing this. Nobody could be expected to dispense so much wisdom for nothing; though it must be admitted Sesuka was liberal for a good payment. If a man brought two fowls and a goat, he could reckon on getting six different interpretations of his dream, one of which would be pretty sure to be right. But if anything went wrong, and all interpretations missed fire, Sesuka would go into the matter carefully with the dreamer. He would question and examine and cross-examine, and it invariably appeared that some vitally important detail of the dream had been left out in the first telling. This would ensure another goat and a second couple of fowls for a new reading.

On the whole Sesuka was an able and conscientious magician and was eminently respected by all who knew him.

On the ground in front of the chief Lithaka had deposited the assegais, head-feathers, and leglets of Keshwan's late companions in robbery and other sin.

This was proof that the men were dead, for the chief could not look on the corpses, which, as a matter of fact, had been pitched into a donga by some of Lithaka's men, and left for the jackals to make a meal off. Napo heaved a sigh of relief when he saw these articles. Keshwan, who stood beside them with an air of proprietorial importance, swelled out his chest, spread his legs apart, and struck an impressive attitude. Those standing round about uttered "*kwowks*" of admiration, especially the women. In savage society the surest passport to the female heart is a gigantic form carried with a swagger.

The loose lips of the chief parted in a sardonic smile, but Keshwan never saw it. He oozed with boastfulness at every pore. He told in ringing language how those forty robbers came at the travellers with a rush and the three heroes fought them back to back. How, when he was wounded, the Dwarf fought on with one hand, mowing down grass and robbers till the earth was thick with them. How the Bushman crept round behind the forty-five robbers, and picked them off with a poisoned assegai six at a time. How he, Keshwan, wielded a spear in one hand and an assegai in the other, and parried the blows so cleverly that no shield was necessary, and how the fifty robbers quailed, terrified before his onslaught. He told how, when the fight had lasted with great fierceness till the going down of the sun, those hundred robbers broke and fled, screaming for mercy, leaving their dead in a great heap, but returned afterwards in the darkness and removed them; and how the three heroes, marching back to the huts to look after the chief's cattle, sang a war-song in honour of Kolwane himself, because of his justice and mercy and grand fighting qualities. Moreover——

"Silence!" cried the chief, with sudden energy.

Keshwan stopped with his arm in the air and his mouth open, and a look of pained surprise on his countenance.

"Let this fool cease his babbling!" said Kolwane. "Bring Tetwa forward."

There was a stir at the back of the chief's hut, and two soldiers marched into the midst of the group leading a

prisoner. At sight of him Keshwan gave a violent start. So did Napo and the Bushman; for this man was none other than he who had fled from the fight with a spear-thrust in the arm. Here was a staggering surprise!

CHAPTER VII

Tells of a dream that wonderfully came true; of a great medicine that was to cure many ailments; of how, in circumventing fate, a doctor was cheated, not for the first time; and how the three travellers continued their journey at express speed.

"SPEAK!" said Kolwane, motioning the soldiers to stand back.

Tetwa spoke. He told how the Dwarf, the Giant, and the Bushman were three of a band of twenty robbers who attacked the drovers and would have driven the cattle off. Seeing him, however, as he approached the huts with no more evil intent than to call on the deceased drovers, those two of the robbers who were now dead attacked him, and he slew them. Thereafter the three prisoners set on him also, while the others drove the cattle back to the huts. He, Tetwa, though sore pressed, fought hard, wounding his assailants—as witness their bodies at the present time—till, being thrust in the fore-arm by the Dwarf's spear, he fled, and lay hidden all night. Now he had come—as witness his presence before the chief—to demand justice against the robbers, and to deliver to Kolwane three head of cattle which escaped from the robbers, and, being found by him wandering, were driven to the kraal.

"I have spoken," said Tetwa, the ill-used and innocent.

Keshwan and his companions in adversity were bereft of speech. The Bushman turned as white as a bushman can, and Lithaka laughed aloud.

"So!" he exclaimed. "This boaster who has told of a great fight is himself the robber! He and those with him deserve to die!"

"Ay!" exclaimed a deep voice from beneath a mound

of blankets; and, before the adventurers could utter a word, Sesuka the witch-doctor rose up by the chief's side, unwound himself from his mat, and began:

"Know, O chief, that the whole of this matter has been known to me, exactly as Tetwa has told it, for four days!"

Here was another staggering surprise. Someone in the crowd said "*Kwowk!*" The old witch-doctor rattled his string of bladders and went on:

"Four nights gone I dreamed a dream, wherein it was revealed to me that these three, the Dwarf, the Giant and the Bushman, would come on a certain day, twenty in all, to attack the drovers and take the cattle, and behold they did so! I awoke from the dream and was minded to tell thee straightway, O Kolwane, when again I fell asleep and dreamed. Then it was revealed to me in the second dream that this man, Tetwa, would also come at the same time on a visit to the drovers, and that he would defend the cattle; and behold he came! I awoke, O chief, and was tempted to come to thee and tell thee of these matters, when, behold, for the third time I slept and dreamed. In this dream I saw the bodies of thy drovers dead in the hut, and the bodies of those two that were slain lying upon the hillside, and such has most assuredly come to pass. Then I awoke, and, being sore troubled, I would have come to thee with the story, but behold I fell asleep——"

"This liar had his bellyful of dreams that night!" thought Napo bitterly.

"——and, behold," pursued the witch-doctor, as calmly as if he was telling the truth, "I dreamed yet again, and in that dream it was revealed to me that if I said nothing these men would be captured, even as they were, and brought hither; whereas if I warned thee the lives of thy drovers would be spared but these three would escape us. And know, O chief, that in this dream of which I speak now it was revealed that the coming of these three, the Dwarf, the Giant, and the Bushman, would have great efficacy in the prevention of sickness amongst our people, in the saving of our cattle from disease, and in warding off drought to the detriment of our crops. For know, O chief, it was revealed to me that each of these

possesses a magical property in the region of the kidneys, the one to ward off sickness"—and he pointed to the Dwarf—"from the other that cattle be immune" and he indicated the Giant—"and from the third that he brings rain in great quantities and abundance."

A murmur of awe and astonishment went up from the crowd.

"Of a surety this man is a great doctor!" said one of the soldiers.

"There is no greater than Sesuka in the whole land!" exclaimed another.

But Kolwane looked up with a cunning smile.

"If your dreams, O wizard," he said slowly, "would rob me of my vengeance against those that despoil me of my herds and kill my drovers, then 'twere better that you slept longer and dreamt less."

"Ay, chief!" broke in Lithaka. "It would be unseemly for those that have thus served thee to be kept here to live in this kraal, eating our food in idleness."

"Fool!" cried Sesuka, flourishing a bladder in his face. "Who counselled that these men be kept here in the kraal to consume our substance and be a burden upon us? Did I not say it was revealed to me in a dream that their magical properties were in and about the kidneys?"

"He said it, he said it!" came in a chorus from the people.

"Did I not say that a medicine made from the kidneys of this Dwarf would make all the people immune from sickness for the space of a whole year, and would cast out devils and assuage the gripes?"

"He said it!" cried a woman in a shrill voice. "I heard those words come from his lips."

"And did I not say," screamed Sesuka, lashing himself into a fury, "that the liver and kidneys of this Giant, mixed with the saliva of a rat, and sprinkled upon the oxen one hour before dawn, would give them immunity from the cattle-plague? Did I not say it?"

"Of a surety you said it!" came in an astonished chorus.

"Thou fool, Lithaka!" thundered the witch-doctor, "did I not say that the kidneys and heart of this

Bushman, roasted upon the fire and soaked in the gall of a hare, would cause abundance of rain to fall under my doctoring and magic?"

"He said that too!" shouted the onlookers.

"Yea, O wizard!" said Lithaka, humbly, "of a truth you said it all, every word of it, and of my folly I repent sorely. In token whereof, if it please the chief, I will slay these murderers with my own hand."

"Nay!" said Sesuka, sternly. "The manner of their death and the cause of it shall lie only with me, else will the efficacy of my medicines be destroyed. In this matter let me take counsel with the chief, whereby the two of us shall devise such manner of killing as shall extract the greater virtues from their carcases."

The three travellers began swallowing as though they had buttons in their throats, while the knees of the Bushman knocked together.

"Lead them away," said Kolwane, motioning towards the prisoners. "Let them be brought before us for the slaying with the rising of to-morrow's sun. As for you, Tetwa, I will deal with you later, and make reward for this service you have done."

The audience was over. The chief arose and waddled into his hut; the witch-doctor, with a shrill giggle, crawled after him to discuss a new form of torture which had just occurred to him; and next moment the Dwarf, the Giant, and the Bushman were back in the prison-hut.

It was by this time almost dark outside, and quite dark in the hut. The reed door was fastened upon them, and they heard someone giving directions to the soldier outside to guard it well. They heard some more of the conversation, too.

"My son lies ill of a fever," said the soldier. "Think you a taste of this medicine from the Dwarf will cure him?"

"Of a surety," said the other—"so be that he lives till the medicine is made. And my crop was spoiled by the drought after last hoeing. Medicine from the Bushman will mend that against the next season, if Sesuka sets not the price of his medicine too high."

"Nay," said the soldier, "this medicine, coming

from three men, shall be in such quantity as to sell cheap—a dose, possibly, for a he-goat or ten measures of corn."

"Over much for a medicine from that rat of a Bushman," was the reply.

"Nevertheless," said the soldier, "would they had been slain to-day, and we had the medicine already. My son is like to die."

"Never fear," was the answer, "even if he die, this medicine shall ward sickness from the rest of your family."

"Then there is some merit even in baboons and monkeys," said the soldier, with a laugh.

"May that medicine shrivel up the vitals and perish the intestines of all that taste it!" said Napo, fiercely.

"A pretty pass have we come to now!" said Keshwan, gulping. "Would that we had taken less heed of this Bushman monkey, and had gone on our way from those accursed drovers' huts!"

"Yet that Bushman monkey of whom ye speak," said Baroa tartly, "thinks while ye bewail. Listen, now, and I will tell how we may escape yet from Sesuka and his devilries."

The Giant knew well enough there was no sense in wasting time over regrets and recriminations. So he crept up to the others and in a whispered confabulation the project was revealed. All were to dig at the hole started by Napo and the Bushman; then, if luck favoured them, the Dwarf was to creep out, while the Bushman and the Giant held the soldier's attention by getting up a pretended altercation inside. Napo was to creep round on the outside of the hut, slay the guard, open the door, and liberate his companions; and, for the rest, they must trust to the fleetness of their feet if they would escape the medicine-man.

They dug quickly but cautiously, till all the soft earth was removed and the hard clay appeared below. Then they could dig no farther. There was a hole now large enough, may be, for a child or a dog to squeeze through, but it would be a tight fit for Napo. However, it was clear that his strength in the coming tussle with the soldier demanded that he should go out, and not

the Bushman, who could have slipped through with ease.

"If I had but a spear I would go," said Baroa, when all was ready. "But we are weaponless, and this thing must be done with the bare hands."

"And if that man cries out we are finished!" said the Giant, solemnly. "Would that I could get through that rathole. I would twist his neck like a fowl's."

"We have heard of your prowess enough and to last us," said Napo, grimly. "You created from ten men who did not exist a regiment of an hundred and slew them all, and were then struck dumb with the lies of a single fool! Have no fear for that soldier. When these hands seize him neither witchcraft nor medicine will avail!"

By this time they knew that it was getting past midnight. A dog began to bay somewhere in amongst the nearer huts. That reminded the Bushman that before daydawn the moon would be up, and unless their enterprise was concluded while there was darkness to cover them they most certainly would fail. Outside they heard the soldier shuffling his feet, for it was cold.

"Now!" said the Dwarf, in a whisper. "You, Keshwan, raise up the frame of the hut gently—so! Nay, gently, gently, or that murrained pig outside will hear us. When ye see my heels disappear, lower the frame of the hut, get you both to the door, and call out as though quarrelling with blows."

Slowly, ever so slowly, the Giant and the Bushman lifted the hut. It went up on that side only an inch or two. In an agony of suspense they held it so while the Dwarf crawled through the aperture. He almost suffocated himself in doing so; indeed, in their anxiety to get him out scathless the others came very near to spoiling the whole plan. Keshwan, perceiving that the hole was not large enough, put out more of his great strength and lunged the hut upwards. There was a nerve-wracking creak of every reed and stave, as if the place had been suddenly smitten by a cyclone. The soldier outside stopped his shuffling.

"Quick!" whispered the Dwarf, wriggling his feet out of the hole.

Down came the frame of the hut a second after, with a crash that shook the ground.

"Fool!" groaned the Bushman, darting to the door.

Napo, once outside, sprang to his full height and stretched his enormous arms as if to test them. Then he sank down upon his hands and knees and began to crawl quickly but silently round in the black shadow of the hut. It was a clear, starlit night; so clear and so silent that he could hear away down in the cattle-kraal the restless champing of the beasts. That dog, too, how it barked!—as though it would raise the very dead!

Swiftly, stealthily he crept, with soundless footfall, scarce daring even to breathe. In a matter of seconds only he was peering round the hut. The sentry was standing there, leaning upon his spear, silhouetted against the clear sky like a black statue. His head was cocked sideways. He had heard that creaking of the hut; then came the crash, and he started. Next second the sound of voices broke on Napo's ear and electrified the soldier.

"Let be, let be!" from the Bushman.

"Nay, it is mine! Give it, or I slay you!" from the Giant.

"Guard!"—and there came the thud of a man's fists on the reed door—"guard, guard!"

"Take your hands off——!"

"You dog of a Bushman!"

There was a blow and a scuffle. The soldier bent down to unlatch the door.

"What is to do?" he began; and at the same instant Napo rose and was upon him. It was all over with a hideous swiftness beyond description. All the great strength of the Dwarf went out in that one effort. Something cracked; there was a shiver and a sigh; and with no other sound or movement the soldier lay there, still.

Deftly the Dwarf's fingers unloosed the latch, and the door was opened.

"Haste!" he whispered, panting for breath.

"Seize his spear!" muttered Baroa. "We may have need of it."

The Giant, as Napo took the dead man's shield and

spear, stooped down and pushed the corpse into the hut, closing and latching the door upon it.

"That old beast and liar will find some medicine in there, after all!" he muttered.

Then they set out for the hills and safety.

To get through the sleeping kraal was a matter of moments only. But one thing had escaped their calculations, and that was the presence of an armed guard of two men at the cattle-kraal. Keshwan it was who first saw them, and they looked up just as the fugitives came flying down upon them. There was no chance to act on a concerted plan this time. Napo, holding the dead soldier's spear, rushed straight at the man in front of him, who was so taken by surprise that for one fatal second he stood rigid and motionless. The next second the spear passed through his breast, and he went down gurgling and gasping to his death. Keshwan it was who, in the same instant, dealt with the other man. He picked up a great boulder and hurled it with all his force straight in the man's face. It struck home; but not before this man, with his skull cracked and his death agony upon him, had emitted a wild shriek, which rang out in the night and echoed against the hill.

"Run!" commanded the Giant, as even Napo stood for a second, petrified by the suddenness of that awful sound.

"Let us take their weapons!" cried the Bushman; and in another moment the fugitives were off again, speeding towards the distant hills with the fleetness of bucks.

They heard dimly the confusion of voices shouting in alarm, the baying of dogs, the rushing of feet hither and thither as if seeking directions of pursuit. Presently these sounds ceased, for the fugitives were out of earshot. But for hours they sped on, nor did they cease to run till twenty miles were between them and Kolwane's kraal.

CHAPTER IX

In which the reader becomes acquainted with a great chief and a monumental liar; witnesses the humiliation of a giant; sees a goat killed under strange circumstances; narrowly escapes being present at a murder; and hears something of a modern Solomon.

WHEN at length the travellers halted, feeling themselves safe from pursuit by Kolwane's soldiers, they found themselves in the neck of a gorge, surrounded by precipitous hills. The place was well wooded, and there was a stream between the hills, at which, no doubt, buck could be trapped in plenty when they came down to drink at nightfall. It was a secluded spot, and here, in one of the wooded kloofs, they decided to lie for a day or two in hiding, against the possibility of Kolwane or the witch-doctor having sent anyone to search for them.

Baroa found a nook which was a good hiding-place and a look-out also, for it was situated half-way up the kloof and commanded the whole extent of the valley. He brought armfuls of the long, soft grass that grew near the waterside and strewed it on the ground between two huge boulders which hid the retreat from sight. He tore down branches and made a sort of cave in the thick bush, small for three men, perhaps, but warm and snug enough. Here in the pleasant shade the three lolled on the soft grass, passing the time in conversation. At night-time they prowled round and about the krantzes, trapping wild fowl, which they ate raw. Baroa ate his feathers and all. Napo and the Giant were more fastidious, and they first plucked and then cleaned the carcases. Baroa regarded these proceedings as a somewhat unnecessary exhibition of high manners, well enough for chiefs and the like, but out of place with fugitives.

During the day-time they rested in the shade of the trees and talked. Napo took the opportunity to tell the whole of his story over again, with embroideries, in the middle of which Baroa, who had heard it before, disappeared to hunt up more food. It took some hours for the Dwarf to get through his adventures, to expound his mission in the world, and to give a befittingly elaborate description of this queen whose whereabouts he was seeking. The Giant listened right through, at first with a considerable show of interest. But as the narrative proceeded he began to assume a thoughtful air, then a general appearance of restlessness, and finally an evident determination to have a say about something himself.

"So!" he exclaimed, when the Dwarf was finished at long last. "And this queen whom ye seek, when ye find her what follows?"

"When I find her we go back to the land of the Bafokeng, where the remnants of my people dwell, that she may rule in the place of her fathers and make us again a mighty nation."

"So! And there, belike, this queen will take to herself a husband to share her throne?"

"Of a surety! How else should the line live, for she is the last of our royal house left from the slaying?"

"Mayhap, Dwarf, it would be better that this queen, instead of seeking a husband from among the remnants of your people, whose chiefs and great men have been slain, leaving but common men to choose from, were to take one back with her."

"To take one—to take back a husband from amongst these wandering dogs! Nay, she should die childless first!"

"All in this land are not wandering dogs," said Keshwan, mysteriously.

"Maybe, yet all are dogs in birth and ancestry compared with her."

"Of that I have doubt," said Keshwan, with a smile. He swelled out his chest and assumed an important air.

"Know, O Dwarf, that you are not the only wanderer

in this land who has been driven by adversity from a high place amongst a great people. I, too, am a chief and the son of a chief!"

"Thou!"

Napo gave a loud guffaw, and the Giant contemplated for one moment arising and slaying him.

"Thou!" repeated Napo, wiping his eyes. "Surely then that Bushman will be claiming next that he is king of the monkeys!"

"Peace!" exclaimed Keshwan, sourly. "You are king of baboons, perhaps; and your queen, I doubt not, is all that you say of her. Yet I am of as noble a lineage. My father is chief of the Bakwena, six thousand strong, my eldest brother is chief of the Bakloa, and my uncle is lord over the whole tribe of Motlu."

"And where are these chiefs and these tribes of whom I have never heard tell?" asked Napo, sceptically.

"Never heard tell because you are a stranger and a wanderer. Their land is yonder a year's journey."

"There is only a great water there," said Napo. "I have seen it. Our people know that the world ends by that water, and there is no land nor any people beyond it."

"Your people are as children for foolishness," said the Giant, swelling up again, for he was on safe ground now and could lie to his heart's content. The tribes he had mentioned, being the first that came to his tongue, were pitiful congregations of famine-stricken outlaws, known to him by ill repute for their thieving propensities; but of course Napo would not know this. As for the great water where the world ended——

"Why, I have myself come in a vessel such as you told me brought those soldiers against your people thousands of years ago. Know that for my folly in revolting against the severities of my father, who is king of the Bakwena, I was expelled from my country, which is two years' journey hence. I was put in a vessel that crawled over the water with an hundred legs, and for twelve moons we journeyed in it. Then we came to the shores of a land yonder, three years' journey from here, and those that brought me left me there. It was ordered

that I should wander in this land till word was brought me of my father's death, whereupon there will come hither men from that country to take me hence to rule over them. Then shall I be chief over the Bakwena, numbering ten thousand."

"Methought you said six thousand but now!" put in Napo, doubtfully.

"Surely I said six, and six it was when I left my father's country. But when I return it will be ten thousand."

"Of what like is your country as to size?" asked Napo, somewhat put out about this.

"Of a size so vast," said Keshwan, "that if you set out to traverse it this day you would be bent with age before even half of that country was traversed. Youths that have gone forth to cross it," said Keshwan, warming up to the subject, "have returned betimes, truly, but not walking, for in the double journey old age overtook them as they went, so that they were carried to their homes again."

"Then," said Napo, "either your people are a race of tortoises, or that land, being so vast, is but sparsely populated, seeing there are but ten thousand people in it."

"Nay, you misheed me," said Keshwan. "I said not there were but ten thousand in that land over which I shall rule, I spoke only of the king's kraal."

"What! Ten thousand in a singe kraal!"

"Of a surety, and that not the largest. There are kraals in my land where the people are as the locusts for multitude. There are kraals that have twenty thousand people——"

"You lie!"

"How say you I lie? Have you been to that land?"

This was a poser, and Napo had to admit that he had not.

"Cease then to call me liar," said Keshwan, virtuously. "I say that in that country over which I shall be king, there are kraals of as many as thirty thousand, and this is considered of no great moment when the king's kraal, which is the smallest, is of fifteen thousand——"

"Now of a surety you said it was *ten* thousand!" shouted Napo. "I mind that ye said it. I heard it well!"

"Ten thousand soldiers—yea, I said that," replied Keshwan. "But I spoke not of the servants and women that belong to the king's kraal. In that land there are an hundred thousand fighting men."

Napo was staggered at the vastness of this number. So was Keshwan, but he managed to conceal his surprise.

"And all these hosts live in amity together?" asked Napo.

"Yea, these people that be under the spear of my father. But there has been no lack of fighting."

"How so, if they live friendly?"

"Because it chances that in past times there was feud betwixt my father's people and the Bakwena——"

"But you said your father's people were the Bakwena!"

"Ay, I said that they *were* the Bakwena. You speak truth when you say that I said it. They most surely were the Bakwena, till on an ill day these dogs revolted and my father made war on them."

"Then who *are* your father's people?"

"The Bakloa."

"You said the Bakloa were under the chiefship of your eldest brother."

"True," said Keshwan, beginning to wish he had not gone into so many details. "I said that they *were* the people of my eldest brother, but he it was that revolted against my father."

"So that when he revolted your father's people joined your brother, and your brother's people joined your father?"

"Even so."

"And under whose spear, then, are these great armies of which you spake but now?"

"These two hundred thousand fighting men——"

"Nay, of a truth you said there were an hundred thousand in the whole country."

"Ay, I said that of my father's people, the Bakwena——"

"Peace! You said but now that your father's people were the Bakloa——"

"My father's people, yea; but, when I speak of the Bakwena, these that belonged to my uncle——"

"Pish!" thundered Napo at the top of his voice. "Your uncle, you told me, was chief of the Motlu."

Keshwan wiped the sweat off his forehead and suggested that to make the whole thing plain he should go over the story again from the beginning. He started to do so, and got so tangled up in a maze of contradictions, falsehoods, and evasions, that before he could get to the end of it all Napo broke in:

"Come now, tell me, how far a journey is this country?"

"A year's journey."

"You have said that it was one year, two years, and three years."

"It dependeth on the speed of a man," said Keshwan feebly.

"And how many women, said you, were in the kraal of the Bakloa?"

"I said there were a thousand women."

"You said not anything at all about the kraal of the Bakloa!" cried Napo, triumphantly. "Of a surety thou, Keshwan, art the very worst liar that ever walked the earth, for not so much as a single falsehood can you speak twice in the same manner."

He rose up and spat, deliberately and with precision.

"When my queen seeketh a husband," he said, sternly, "she shall find one amongst the greatest of the earth, with his herds and his people, to rule under her. No wanderer seeking his own fortune shall come nigh while this arm has its strength and this brain of mine its cunning."

"If perchance that queen of thine has not found a husband already in Sekonyela," said the Giant, spitefully.

"That thief and murderer," said Napo calmly, "will pay to my spear the debt he owes it, whether or no."

"You have first to find him and her."

"Ay, and I shall find neither by chattering with fools. To-night at moonrise we shall journey on."

But, as it happened, they began their journey before darkness fell. For just then the two heard a shout from behind a shoulder of the kloof in which they were resting. It was the voice of Baroa calling them.

"He is beset by robbers!" cried the Giant, springing to his feet, spear in hand.

Napo, too, grasped the spear he had taken from the murdered guard at the kraal of Kolwane. Together they bounded over the rocks and through the scrub in the direction of the Bushman's cries.

They had not far to go, but before they got there the Giant thought his hour had come. There was a plinth of rising ground topped by boulders between themselves and the place where Baroa was. Up it the two warriors dashed, Keshwan leading. He had just reached the top when he was struck by a large brown object, which hurtled over the ridge with the force of a cannon-ball. Keshwan was caught in the pit of the stomach and knocked over backwards. The next second an assegai whizzed past his head and, with unerring aim, embedded itself in the brown object. There was a shout and a rush, and Keshwan was on his feet again. Bounding away into the rocky gorge below them was a goat, between whose shoulders the assegai thrown by Baroa was sticking. Baroa himself appeared next second, and then began a race between the Bushman and the Giant to get the goat, and a wild rush by the goat to get away from the Bushman and the Giant.

The Giant won. His feet flew over the stones and crashed through the undergrowth, leaving the Bushman far behind. It was a long chase, and the goat gave in. In fact it was almost dead when Keshwan reached it. It had bounded down to the banks of the little stream, when he overtook it, felled it with a blow, twisted the assegai deep into its neck, slit its throat to let the blood run, and thereupon hoisted the carcase upon his shoulders. He was turning to ascend the kloof when Napo and the Bushman came up.

"A good kill!" said Baroa, with a grin of self-satisfaction. "My aim was true and my arm steady."

He reached up for the carcase of the goat. Keshwan swung round on him with a snarl.

"A good kill truly," he said, with a sniff—"but it was mine. Your aim is good enough to prick but not to slay, little monkey. See," and he pointed to the gaping throat.

"There is my assegai in the wound I made," persisted the Bushman. "Your cut was no more than blood-letting."

"Nay," said Keshwan, "this assegai of yours I drove home with my own hand. Take it, Bushman, and spit rats with it!"

"Peace!" exclaimed Napo. "What matter whose the kill since we are all to eat of the flesh?"

"Nay," said the Bushman in a huff, "eat of the flesh I shall not, nor shall ye, till my claim is proved that the kill was mine."

"The carcase shall rot first!" exclaimed the Giant, hotly. "Think you I am to be butted in the stomach by a foul and ill-smelling goat to no purpose than to give its carcase up to the first prowling bushman who claims it?"

"And I," shouted Baroa, in a fury, "am I to give up what falls to my throw to the first wandering jackal that sniffs at my heels for it! May your pot-belly first be butted by an hundred goats!"

He caught the dead goat by one leg and gave it a tug.

"Let be!" roared the Giant, "else I will slit your gizzard with your own assegai!"

"And you," shouted Baroa, "give me my goat, else will I spread out your entrails for the jackals on every hill from here to Zululand!"

Keshwan dumped down the goat with surprising alacrity and invited the other to perform this feat forthwith.

Blazing with anger, the Bushman and the Giant faced each other. A fight to the death over the carcase of a goat would not have been considered at all extraordinary in those times, notwithstanding that one of the combatants was at least three times the size of the other. Many would have regarded it as the most suitable and expeditious method of settling so vital a difference. Devastating wars had been created over a matter of no greater importance. When one of Teteleku's young

men stole a white-faced cow from Pipani's kraal, more than a thousand men were killed before that cow was recovered—and all Teteleku's oxen with it. On the celebrated occasion when Batloo and his courtiers visited Matezebo and, after spending a convivial evening, came away with the chief's cooking-pot and a string of beads, fifty homes were placed in mourning. It is true that Matezebo afterwards admitted having planned the theft himself with the object of wiping out Batloo in a just cause, because he, being a man of peace, objected on principle to offensive measures. But even when they knew this, everybody admitted the punishment would have been well deserved, if the theft had been actually committed; and as it never was, and Batloo, being quite innocent, was wiped out nevertheless, public respect for Matezebo went up by several degrees in that neighbourhood. If Keshwan and Baroa had fought over that goat, therefore, till not a strip of flesh remained on the bones of either of them, no moralist would have arisen to make a sermon about it.

But it chanced, nevertheless, that some sort of a moralist was at hand, and Fate had decided that no murder should be done that day.

For, just as Napo the Dwarf was contemplating a single-handed assault on both disputants, to settle the difference that way, there emerged suddenly upon the scene a youth of engaging appearance. He came through the undergrowth of the kloofs, grinning broadly. Baroa the Bushman saw him first as he crossed the little stream, and almost forgot about the goat. The prevalent attitude towards strangers in this period of history was a lively expectation of being killed and subsequently robbed by them, unless you were agile enough to get in the first blow. Besides, this might be one of Kolwane's men. Baroa, snatching his assegai from the goat's carcase, aimed at the stranger's head.

"Hold!" cried the youth, saluting. "I give you peace!"

"Then you give that which we most need," said Napo, with a laugh, "for there is little enough peace here with these two boasters quarrelling."

"That I perceive," said the stranger. "Hearing

some words of this dispute as I came from yonder, I would know more."

"Then judge you between them," said Napo. "These fools wrangle as to whose the goat is which that one first struck with his assegai and this one killed."

"Nay," said the young man, "it would not beseem me to judge of so great a problem when there is one near at hand who hath made a great talk over the whole country for his wisdom."

"Who is this wise man?" demanded Keshwan.

"He is the chief, Vokwana the Wise, head of the Mokwana. He would adjudge this matter in such wise that no man would have the wit to gainsay his judgment."

"Of this man and his judgments we have not heard, being strangers," said Napo, doubtfully.

"Ere ye leave the land ye shall hear much of them," said the young man glibly. "He adjudged that a black cow with a white tail is the worth of seven spotted cows, such being commoner as there are more spots on cows than tails. He adjudged that four measures of ground corn were of the same value exactly as a full field in the growing, since the ground corn could at once be eaten but the growing corn might be destroyed by hail. He adjudged that a wild duck snared by a man was of the full worth of three bucks killed by dogs, because a dog kills by nature and without effort, whereas a man must use high cunning to ensnare a duck. He adjudged——"

"Enough," said Napo. "And concerning these judgments, which I admit possessed wisdom, was there none that called them in question?"

"Nay, how could such be?" asked the youth in surprise. "For in that matter of the cows, did not Vokwana the Wise give the one with the white tail and reserve to himself the seven cows with spots? And of the four measures of ground corn, did he not give them to Metooka and keep the full field in the growing? As for the three bucks, the man whose dogs killed them got the wild duck, and the man that snared the duck got one hindquarter of buck, so that buck and duck were thus severally apportioned with great justice and wisdom, each being satisfied."

"And Vokwana, I doubt not, most of all," said Napo.

"Without question," said the youth, blandly—"his judgments being of such character as to satisfy everyone."

"And where lives this wise man?" asked the Bushmán.

"Not two hours' march yonder," was the reply. "Come with me and bring the goat, and ye shall have proof of his wisdom."

Napo hesitated, for he was hungry.

"It seemeth to me it matters little, either the dispute or the judgment," he said, "since we shall all eat the goat. It seems a simple matter to carry to so wise a man."

"Nay, that is not so," said the other, "for the quality of his wisdom is such that even the most simple matter is made devious and complicated when he judgeth it."

"Let us go," said Keshwan, seizing the goat again. "Else there will be no settling of the question save by the spitting of that little monkey on my spear."

"Ay, let us go," retorted Baroa the Bushman. "Else must I lay this robber of goats by the heels with a slit gizzard."

In sullen silence they marched away, the youth leading.

The reader will observe presently from how trivial a source a great matter may be set in motion; for, as it fell out, that quarrel about the dead goat was to carry the feet of Napo a long way on his quest for Golden Glory.

CHAPTER X

How the Dwarf, the Giant, and the Bushman reached the kraal of wisdom; how Bamboola complicated a simple problem; how a goat looked on while a wise man gave judgment; what three fools lost by quarrelling; and how Vokwana fastened the noose about his own neck.

AFTER a good hour's walk—it was much nearer two hours, and the goat grew heavier and heavier on the Giant's back—they came in sight of a kraal. It was perched, like every other kraal of the period, on a hill-top. The home of the black man in those days was also his look-out and his fortress. It was invariably so situated as to command an extensive view of the approaches. The advance of an enemy could be seen by daylight from the thorn-fence that surrounded it. By night the kraal was guarded against surprise by a ring of soldiers of such number as the size of the tribe permitted. The domain of an important chief might extend in a radius of twenty miles, but only so long as he could hold it against the aggression of other chiefs. With this object he would establish military outposts, whence an approach was scouted; inner cordons of civilian and military guards to look after the cattle; and, frequently, separate posts for the protection of the grain-fields and the outlying kraals. The civilians consisted entirely of old men, women, and little children. Every male over the age of sixteen was a soldier. Where the tribes were small, boys of below that age took their places with the men, and if such a tribe was attacked—and could not get away fast enough and settle elsewhere—the women and girls would join the ranks and fight, too. Some of the fiercest conflicts that were ever fought in that country were won by the fury

of the women. They had good enough reason for fighting, too, because if their men were defeated they would be annexed by the victors, along with the cattle and other perquisites.

The territory over which Vokwana the Wise lorded it entitled that renowned sage to rank as a chief of tertiary importance. The chiefs of a twenty-mile radius and over were great men, according to the number of their wives and cattle. Those of a fifteen-mile radius came second, and had to walk with humility if they would not excite the envy of their more powerful neighbours. Below them came the ten-mile men, to which class Vokwana belonged; and, as there were no other ten-mile men within a three days' march, he felt himself at liberty when occasion demanded to exterminate some of the five-milers. He would do this with great thoroughness, dispatch, and cruelty, and as a mere matter of principle, but he never occupied their territory. If he did that, and extended his own, the fifteen and twenty-mile potentates would come down on him heavily, and very soon there would be nothing left by which to remember him. So, when he took over a five-miler, he would create a good number of widows and orphans, of course, and loot all the cattle and burn the huts; then, after sending handsome presents to some of the nearby twenty-milers, he would send round offering to take under his wing some distant tribe of the same calibre as that exterminated. This showed his wisdom. It kept him always comfortably secure in his chieftainship, with a subservient following of petty chiefs, who hated and feared him but were smaller than himself.

Bamboola the youth explained all this, and much more, as the travellers journeyed towards the kraal of wisdom. Indeed, he said so much to indicate the transcendent, not to say superhuman, cunning of his revered master, that the squabblers forgot their quarrel in sheer admiration, and suggested halting forthwith and consuming the goat while the young man regaled them with more stories. At this Bamboola threw up his hands in amazement. How, he entreated, could they even tolerate, let alone enjoy, the taste of that goat with this bitter quarrel undecided between them? Of a

surety if they partook of even a mouthful of the carcase before the dispute was settled in all amity and justice, their bellies would immediately distend frog-like and their vitals inside shrivel away to nothingness. But, on the contrary, when judgment had been given and the peace made, to the satisfaction of all concerned, the flesh of that goat would be sweet as honey and they would arise from the feast like giants refreshed.

"Then, if go on we must," said Keshwan, with a groan, "carry the goat yourself, for it hath a high smell and is heavier than an armful of stones."

With that he slung the goat across Bamboola's shoulders, and the young man had less to say during the remainder of the journey.

They toiled up the hill, passed through the thorn enclosures where the cattle were kraaled at night, and came into the collection of reed huts and grass-walled lean-tos which comprised Vokwana's capital. Bamboola being recognised about the place, nobody challenged them, and they made straight for the chief's hut.

There is a paralysing monotony in the architecture of a Kafir kraal, and has been since the days when Ham set out in the beginning of the world's history to spread the black-skinned races over the universe. Other races since the days of the cave-dwellers have advanced in the matter of housing accommodation, but these people have not. Indeed, it is doubtful that Ham ever dwelt in a cave, because, if he did, he would have kept to it and his descendants after him. He probably lived in a hut from the very first and thought it great style in architecture, as it was for those days; but he was so entirely satisfied with it that he never transmitted any desire to his posterity to fare better and build with stone. Other barbarians learned to make bricks, to hew stones, and to build with marble, and as the usages of such material grew familiar they evolved more elaborate ideas, and made statues. Then they were civilised, and could give themselves up to gorgeous pleasures and grand vices, and so became patterns for the ages following. Not so the descendants of Ham. *They* stuck to their huts and still stick to them, and the noblest idea they have of art is a legless pot or a clay

image with a face like a nightmare. In the circumstances, it is scarcely necessary to say that Vokwana's capital was a replica in detail of Tsotelo's and Kolwane's, which we have already visited.

In one particular, however, it differed from the others. Napo had noticed as they passed through the village that before they reached the chief's hut there was a high fence or stockade of considerable strength, through which they were admitted by a single opening. This obviously was for use in defence of the kraal against attack, a provision which seemed wise for a chief of Vokwana's tyrannical tendencies.

Arrived at the *lekhotla* in front of the chief's hut, Bamboola deposited the goat on the ground and ordered that it must on no account be touched. He drew round it a circle in the sand with his middle finger. Then he spat in the goat's ear. He said if any person stepped inside the circle after that had been done and before judgment was passed, the wisdom of the chief would vanish utterly and he would become an imbecile.

"It is true," said a thin-faced woman with a hoe.

Leaving the travellers to contemplate the goat, and the goat to contemplate the blue sky, Bamboola repaired to the hut to summon the Man of Wisdom. Presently the two emerged, Vokwana the Wise leading. He was a comparatively young man, of a most hideous and cruel aspect; a man of large build and great physical strength, with bloodshot eyes betokening the drunkard and a voice that displayed the bully. His ears were adorned with enormous brass rings, he wore a kaross of leopard skins about his shoulders, and he carried a thick and heavy spear, of which the haft was bound closely about with brass wire. Brass rings glistened upon his arms and ankles. He was evidently a man of substance. As for the quality of wisdom that had made him famous, it was of course situated somewhere inside his bulging skull; therefore when you saw his face you had to take it on trust.

The travellers gazed with a sensation of awe on this being when he presented himself, and noted the reverence with which his people received him.

"A judgment is sought of thee, O chief and father!"

exclaimed Bamboola, making obeisance. "These who have brought this goat, hearing of thy great wisdom everywhere in the land, sought me out and begged me with many pleadings, even to tears, that I should bring them hither for the settling of a most complicated and grievous dispute."

The Man of Wisdom sat down on a mat that was brought him, took snuff from the reed box in the lobe of his ear, and drank copiously from a gourd full of beer, thereby to strengthen his brain for the coming task. The available population of the kraal massed themselves round and about in a double row and prepared to listen. Stragglers outside the kraal-fence were shouted for to come swiftly, that they might miss no word of what was going. They came running along, and brought others with them, and it was quite evident to the three travellers that a judgment by this Man of Wisdom was a thing nobody in the vicinity would care to miss. The Wise Man waited till all were assembled, then he said:

"Let the case be stated."

Bamboola made a motion with his hand and Napo stepped forward.

"It is this, O chief," he said. "Baroa the Bushman cast his assegai at this goat and hit it. The goat ran. Keshwan the Giant chased it, caught it, and slit its throat. Each disputes that the other killed the goat. To whom, therefore, does it belong?"

"Nay!" broke in Bamboola, hustling him aside, vexatiously. "Your tongue, Dwarf, is a child's, and you put the matter like a child for simplicity. Let me state this cause, O chief, in such manner as shall make it worthy of thy skill in giving judgment.

"Know then, O chief and father, that this man called the Bushman, wandering in the kloof yonder, encountered this goat, the which is dead, and its carcase here lieth, to put that fact beyond dispute; whereupon encountering the goat, or the goat encountering the Bushman, the which thy wisdom shall presently decide, two things befell forthwith, namely the Bushman raised his assegai in defence against the goat, or in attack thereupon, as thy wisdom must judge, and the goat,

either by fear or strategy, as I profess not to determine, sprang forward, or backwards, or perchance to the side. So much, O chief and father, I would make clear, that when the goat saw the Bushman, either from fright or prudence, or perhaps from a grave disorder at the smell of bushmen, it fled. In that moment these several things were accomplished at the same time: the Bushman cried out loudly and began to chase the goat, he that they call Giant heard the Bushman's cry, and both these that are called Dwarf and Giant set forth furiously, approaching towards the goat and the Bushman. As this fell about neither saw the other: the Bushman saw not the goat, for it had fled; the goat saw not the Bushman nor the Giant; and the Giant saw not the goat nor the Bushman.

"Now, O chief and father, of thy great wisdom heed carefully what followed.

"As the goat and the Giant rushed in blind haste, uproar, and confusion, each suddenly encountered the other. The goat struck the Giant in the middle a sore blow, and by that impact and well-directed aim, in the full force of its strength, laid low the Giant and came nigh by that act to killing and destroying him utterly——"

"Liar!" interposed the Giant, wrathfully.

"Peace!" cried Bamboola, with an offended air. "How shall our chief and father judge of this complexity if your chattering interrupts the statement? Know, O chief and father, that the Giant, being sore hurt and angered, rose up and gave chase to the goat, and fled after it down the hillside to within a spear's throw of the little stream. But know first, O chief, that as the goat ran the Bushman threw his assegai, which struck in the goat's shoulder, and thus the goat fled, assegaied by the Bushman. Nevertheless the Bushman was not fleet enough to catch it, and the Giant was, and, coming upon it he, in great rage and ungovernable fury, thrust into it still deeper the Bushman's assegai, whereat the goat gave up his breath and died. Hereupon the Giant slit the throat of the goat, and claimed it against the arrival of the Bushman as his kill and not the Bushman's.

"Now, O chief and father, this is the matter in dispute: whether the Bushman's cry summoned the Giant to assist in the killing of the goat, thereby giving the Giant a share in the kill; whether the Bushman's assegai did of a verity inflict such hurt as must have encompassed the goat's death; whether the goat did in actual truth die of the Bushman's assegai; whether, if it so died, it was the hand of the Bushman that killed it or the hand of the Giant that killed it with the Bushman's assegai; or whether it might have lived against the Bushman's wound had not the Giant slit its throat and so ended it."

"All which was encompassed in the few words I uttered," said Napo, sourly.

"Wherefore," pursued the triumphant Bamboola, "judge of thy great wisdom, O chief and father, which of these twain killed the goat, and to whom, having killed it, the body of the goat belongs."

"Or judge," put in Baroa, "whether the goat hath not died of age and weariness while this babbler told his story."

Bamboola stepped back smiling, amid a low murmur of applause.

Vokwana the Wise, having listened to this recital of the case with an air of vast and almost appalling wisdom, shut his eyes in wrapt contemplation of the intricate problem that was now presented for his decision. For a full five minutes he sat there motionless and silent. Nobody in the circle of bystanders said a word. The three travellers waited and watched, and wished very sincerely, whatever the decision was to be, they could set to on that goat and enjoy the longed-for meal for which they were sorely hungering. In the middle of the circle the goat, wiser than any of them, turned its glassy eyes towards the sun. At last the Man of Wisdom spoke.

"The case, as it seemeth to me, stands thus," he said; and the three travellers groaned. "This goat was first discovered by the Bushman, whose assegai struck it—but in the shoulder, which is no vital part. It was thereupon chased by the Giant, who smote it, not with his own spear but with the Bushman's assegai, and

with that weapon created a vital wound. But the vital and fatal wound was created not by his spear, but by the assegai of another. Thus, the Bushman delivering no vital wound, the kill could not be the Bushman's."

"Well reasoned, O chief and father!" came in a murmur from the crowd.

"And the vital wound of the Giant being delivered by the assegai of the Bushman, the kill could not be the Giant's."

"Well reasoned again, O chief and father!" came as one voice from the admiring crowd.

"Yet it is clear and manifest by the facts that the goat is killed."

"Wisely said, O chief and father."

"It remaineth, therefore, ere judgment be uttered, to determine no longer the manner of the killing, since that we know, nor the time of the killing, since that is of small account, but the place of the killing. How stood you, Giant, at the place of killing?"

"I stood thus," said Keshwan, "by the left side of the goat, with one hand upon the assegai, thus, and one hand upon the goat's horn—thus."

"And how stood you, Bushman?"

"I stood not at all, but came running," said Baroa.

"Good! And the goat, how lay it? Was it disposed on the hither side of the kloof stream?"

"Nay," said Bamboola, "on the far side, about three paces, or perhaps four."

"Was it on the far side hither, or beyond the three rocks that mark the boundary of my lands and the lands of Tindaba?"

"We saw no such rocks," said Keshwan.

"I know them well," said Bamboola, briskly. "It was on the hither side."

"The hither side of the boundary but the far side of the stream?"

"Even so, O chief!"

"The goat, therefore, was slain on my land?"

"It was, O father!"

"Good," said the Man of Wisdom. "These points being now established as to the killing of the goat, the manner of its killing, and the place where it was killed,

but one fact remains to be determined ere judgment is given. Now mark well, and answer me with forethought. Who bore this goat from the place of killing? Dwarf, did you bear it?"

The people hustled forward to get a better hearing, because they knew the really crucial point had been reached in the proceedings. Some of them bore a strained look on their faces, and nobody dared to breathe. Every eye was turned on Napo.

"Nay, chief, I carried the goat not at all," said the Dwarf.

In tense silence Vokwana the Wise turned towards the Bushman.

"You, Bushman, answer with care—did you bear it?"

"Nay, chief."

Then, "Answer me, Giant—did *you* bear it?"

"Ay, O chief, I bore it till certain rank and pestilential vapours issuing from the goat's hair, and the body thereof increasing grievously in weight, I resigned it to Bamboola, who carried it to the kraal."

"He speaks true," said one of the bystanders, "for we saw Bamboola bring it."

"That, then, is determined," said the Man of Wisdom; "and all the facts of this cause being thus known and severally arraigned, my judgment upon the case is this, following."

He took a pinch of snuff with solemnity and deliberation. Not a soul in the crowd stirred. Then he arose from his mat, stood forth in the centre of the circle, and said:

"Neither Giant nor Bushman unaided slew the goat, therefore the kill belongs to each, but since one kill cannot belong to two men, this kill belongs to neither. Neither Giant nor Bushman carried the goat into this kraal, therefore, whether or not the killing was in dispute, neither could claim the carcase. The goat was slain within the boundary of my lands, the carcase was carried to my kraal by one of my people, and, as that which is held by the people is by law the rightful property of their chief, I give judgment that the goat is mine, and hereby take, impound, and confiscate it.

You, Bamboola, shall have a small portion of the fore-part as your reward for bringing it hither, these that disputed so grievously over a goat that was not theirs shall have nothing, and as for the remainder, let it be prepared as food for me before sundown. I have spoken. The judgment is given!"

In the murmur of applause that followed on the above decision it seemed that a brief period of blankness flooded the minds of the three famished travellers. When they regained their faculties it was just in time to see Bamboola vanish behind the chief's hut dragging the goat with him.

"Thief and liar!" yelled Keshwan, and made a dart after him.

"Seize this braggart!" shouted Vokwana, and next instant two soldiers had the Giant in their grasp. The Dwarf made a movement as if to hurl himself upon them.

"Seize the Dwarf, too!" cried Vokwana, and in another moment he also was a prisoner. Nor was Baroa the Bushman unheeded. A soldier swooped down on him like an eagle and held him in a grip of iron.

"Drive from my kraal these goat-stealing wanderers, who seek the judgments of Vokwana, yet abide not by them," said the chief, sternly. "Go, dogs and jackals and bush-prowlers! Get ye from this place and see that ye return not, else shall your fate be as that goat's which ye slew!"

With that he walked up to Napo and deliberately struck the Dwarf in the face. Then he walked up to Keshwan and spat in his. A mist of rage and humiliation flooded over Napo's mind, and for a moment he almost choked. Then, regaining his voice, he said:

"For this insult you would lie there stiff and dead in a moment, Vokwana, but that I am held captive!"

"And I would rip open your carcase, being dead, and trample it," said Keshwan, furiously, "but that I have no spear!"

But Vokwana had turned away before they spoke and did not hear them; which was perhaps just as well for them. A moment later a small body of soldiers surrounded the travellers and began hustling them down

the hillside at the double. They went, speechless with fury. It was impossible to resist. They were dragged and pushed and pulled over the rough boulders, through the cattle-enclosures, and out into the veld. There they were released.

"Go!" was the command given them.

Napo turned to his captors and said:

"Go back to your chief and tell him this: Napo sends greeting to a man that is already dead! For, if wait I must till my hair is white and the flesh is shrivelled on my bones, I will come back and exact payment from your chief for the insult he has put upon me!"

"And tell him this, also," said Keshwan, with vibrant malignity, "that though I wait till my back is bent with age, and my eyes sightless, and my body palsied, ay, though I be of such age and infirmities that men must carry me by the head and heels, yet will I most surely return with a great army and dip my spear in the blood of his people!"

"And of me," said the Bushman, shrilly, "tell him that Baroa will be there also when these things are doing, and will set a torch to his huts that shall leave not a sign or vestige nor a blade of his corn standing!"

The soldiers laughed loud and long.

"Get ye away, boasters and thieves!" they answered, "else we spit you like rats on these spears of ours. Go!"

And the three hungry and disillusioned travellers went.

CHAPTER XI

Tells how the Giant invested himself with a new personality, acquired a strange outfit, and was persuaded to eschew earthquakes; why Gogoza prescribed a dose of medicine for a black dog; and how Dabazooki the wizard came to Tindaba's kraal.

THEY walked across the veld in silence till a turn of the way shut the kraal from view. Then they sat down as with one consent by the footpath.

"Whither go we next?" asked the shrill voice of the Bushman.

"To a land," said Napo, dully, "where goats chase fools crying to the fools to kill them, and the fools kill the goats and throw their carcases to the vultures. In that land we shall be very happy."

Keshwan groaned.

"And if peradventure in that land we should chance to encounter a chief famed for the wisdom of his judgments, I with one thrust of a spear will strew the ground with his vitals," he said.

There was a glum silence.

"Better to strew the ground with the vitals of a goat and eat the goat," said Baroa the Bushman. "Let us go on toward the hills yonder and search for food."

"There is a kraal on the far side of that kloof," said Keshwan. "I see the tops of huts. Maybe there is a mealie-field where we might feed to-night."

They rose up without further ado and resumed their journey. They decided tacitly that the last word had been said about that goat. It was a subject too dangerous and painful to reopen. And as there was just then nothing else they could think of worth talking about, they trudged on in gloomy silence. As they went, they

rolled their tongues in fancy round the most delicious morsels of goat's flesh, and wondered in stern reality from where their next meal was to come. It was while engaged in speculation of such sort that the brain of the Giant was smitten with an idea.

"Bethink ye," he said, stopping the march suddenly, "how comfortably well off are the wizards in this land."

"They have to eat and plenty," assented Baroa. "Gifts are made them to secure their enchantments and ward off their spells. They are greater even than the chiefs."

"Yet methinks," said Keshwan, pursuing a train of thought, "the wizards are liars and thieves, like the chiefs, but worse."

"Tsotelo's doctor, Pombeta, was a liar, a thief, and a murderer," said Baroa. "He waxed fat on his villainies, and all men bowed to him."

"And that old baboon Sesuka at Kolwane's kraal, he that would have made a medicine of the three of us for his detestable doctorings, that man was a windbag and a liar!" said Keshwan with emphasis. "It is so everywhere in the land. Yet these men want for nothing in food, cattle, and beer. All comes to them just as they would that it came."

"Yet have I known a wizard that was both wise and just," put in Napo. "Such an one was Kuena the Crocodile——"

"Peace!" interrupted Keshwan, surlily. "We have heard overmuch of this Kuena, who lived in a country where everything was different. We live in a land of bush-rats, not crocodiles."

"And a land where the bush-rats walk on two legs," retorted Napo.

"Ay, Dwarf, and have cunning, whereas crocodiles have only teeth," said Keshwan. "Listen now, and you shall see what I plan so that we may go hungry no more in this land, where only the liar's belly is filled and the thief's basket overflows.

"Know ye that when I was a youth I was much in the company of wizards, both at my father's kraal and at the kraals near by. I know these people and learned something of their magic. I mind well the old wizard

and doctor that was named Kwokwa. He died of the gripes, being sorely smitten after a beer-drink. This man was a great rain-maker, known everywhere in the land, and for his rain-making he acquired much wealth in herds. Oft have I watched him summoning the rain by a process I learned from him, the which ye shall see practised in good time.

"Now it is borne in on me that better than this foodless wandering would it be if I practise at those kraals we visit henceforth such of his magic as I learned, taking payment in corn and food as we go on."

"You!" exclaimed Napo, incredulously. "Know you anything of the signs and portents? Can you read the skies, and smell the winds, and feel the tremors of the earth?"

"As to that," said Keshwan, shamelessly, "all that I know is the difference betwixt a drought and a thunderstorm, and it is not much more that any of the kraal fools know, who swallow the magic of the rain-makers."

"What then," said Napo, warily, "if ye set out to make rain for a kraal and there followeth a drought?"

"I care not if there followeth a famine and a pestilence," said Keshwan, "so be that we travel fast enough never to be overtaken and brought back to account for it."

"That is well answered," said the Bushman. "So that we get food and make good our journey, let the land blister! Besides, the rain will come some day."

"Assuredly; and my magic will be of such quality that if it comes not when I say it comes, it shall be put down to a spotted cow in the kraal, or the chief's wife being ill of a malady, or some person having a cast in his eye. These were the reasons given by Kwokwa when the rain failed him."

"And if by any peradventure it *did* rain when you said it would," put in Napo, "you would be so smitten with wonder at that marvel that you would babble the whole thing out and bring us all to the spear!"

"Peace!" exclaimed Keshwan. "If you fear me for a fool we shall at least be protected by your wisdom, Napo, for you and the Bushman shall be partners in my magic. Look now! A rat must be found of whose skin

we must make a bag. Then I must have certain herbs, also the carcases of a few beetles, and a gourd of water. I must be dressed in reeds, with my face smeared with clay and my legs circled with bladders. Then when we reach a kraal I will make magic with these medicines, you two attending upon me, and each shall demand fee in food for our journey. I tell you, we shall travel on full stomachs henceforth!"

The more he talked about his project, the more enamoured he became of it, and it took very little to infect Baroa with his enthusiasm. Napo made no secret of having doubts as to the ability of Keshwan to carry the part; but he was overruled. In the discussion of plans their hunger was forgotten, and they were soon all eagerness to begin. The first item in the wizard's stock-in-trade was very soon forthcoming, for the veld swarmed with rats of all sizes. Baroa the Bushman discovered tracks, crawled on his stomach along a sandy donga, found the hole where a family of the vermin was congregated, and returned with three beauties almost as large as young cats. They were killed, cut open with a sharp stick, and skinned in next to no time, and soon the three pouches were drying on a stone in the sun. Search was then made for a wild pumpkin, a large, fleshy vegetable, sour to the taste, with a skin like parchment. This, too, was found ere long, and hollowed out. Off the interiors of the rats and pumpkin the three travellers made a meal which Keshwan declared was alone sufficient to inspire them with the attributes of wizardry in its higher branches.

They gathered some other odds and ends: a few scraggy plants of great virtue for their drawing power on the clouds, a number of small beetles which were killed and dried, and several varieties of bush spider which were similarly treated in the interests of science. Then they moved down the donga to a spot where there was a stagnant pool surrounded by reeds. Here a head-dress was fashioned for the wizard which, when it was properly adjusted, gave him the appearance of carrying a crockery crate on his shoulders. His face, legs, and body were thereafter daubed with wet clay in a pattern of rings and circles, and tufts of reed were fastened about

his knees and ankles. When these adornments were complete he looked hideous enough to send a cow into convulsions, and would have done so easily, and stolen the cow afterwards, had one been there.

By this time the Bushman and the Giant were in a fury to begin operations, and they wanted to start right off and make rain for the kraal they had seen behind the hills. Keshwan felt that with this outfit he could do practically anything. He said he could make lightning as easily as rain, and could even dabble in earthquakes if he cared to. In fact, he was not sure but what he would go into the earthquake business straight away. There might be more pay in it than in rain, because people could be frightened over it. Yes, on second thoughts it should be earthquakes——

"Fool!" exclaimed the Bushman. "What profit will it be to us to bring earthquakes and ruin the land?"

"If, indeed, you would not be the first to run howling if you saw one," said Napo.

"Nay, ye misheed me," explained Keshwan. "My magic shall consist in the keeping away of earthquakes, not the bringing of them. And as they never come at all in these parts I shall safely contract immunity therefrom and receive large pay."

They debated this over for some time, but after a while it was decided that for the present it would be more prudent to keep to rain. Keshwan grumbled, but he was overruled. He privately resolved, however, to dabble a bit in lightning at an early opportunity, and perhaps go farther afield and touch the plague. This wizardry fired his ambitions and excited his imagination. He wanted to get off at once to that kraal, and fumed and fretted because Napo thought a more favourable appearance could be made at sundown.

In the late afternoon, therefore, the three set forth in the direction of the kraal. On the way they concocted a plausible story to account for the fact that a wizard of such ability and renown was travelling around instead of keeping a good, steady situation as doctor to an established tribe. Keshwan was to go by the name of Dabazooki, and the story was that the three of them dwelt in Zululand, where Dabazooki's renowned magic

having been turned against a wicked chief in punishment for a grave offence against Chaka, that potentate afterwards, in order to make peace with the wicked chief, expelled Dabazooki and his faithful companions from the country for a year. He was accordingly making his way to the tribe of his father's uncle in Pondoland, where he proposed resting till the edict of expulsion was withdrawn. All this would be recounted at great length everywhere they went, with suitable embroideries, especially in regard of the magical powers of Dabazooki.

While they were arranging these details they came suddenly in sight of the kraal and paused to look at it. It was a small congregation of thatched huts, evidently belonging to one of the five-milers abutting on the territory of Vokwana. It was situated as usual on a hill-top. Leading from the kraal-gate down the slope of the hill was a footpath bordered with white stones. At the bottom of the hill was a small tree-lined stream, towards which they discerned the figure of a woman slowly walking, evidently to replenish the water-gourds which she carried on her shoulders. This gave Keshwan an idea.

"See yonder woman going to the drift?" he asked, pointing her out. "Now I think that we should send on ahead the Bushman here, that he may get into conversation privily with this woman, and ascertain from her all such particulars as may be concerning the kraal and its affairs. Then when we arrive there we shall acquire reputation for great wisdom by seeming to know, by the exercise of my magic, matters of which strangers could not be expected to be aware."

"But how so," asked the Bushman, "since the woman, having once seen me, will see me again in your company, and will know that I told you?"

"Leave that to me to think on," said Keshwan; and forthwith Baroa was dispatched to the drift, while the others lay in hiding. He was away a considerable time, but when he returned the information he had gleaned promised to be as useful as it was extensive.

The kraal, so he had discovered, was that of Tindaba, whose name they had heard mentioned when Vokwana was questioning them about the goat. This man was a

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cripple and an unwilling vassal of Vokwana; and there was at that moment great fear and uneasiness among the people that Vokwana contemplated a raid and slaughter. To make matters worse, the eldest son of the chief was ill of a fever, in regard of which it was fully expected if he died the matter of the succession would be used by Vokwana as a pretext for forcing a quarrel, the upshot of which would certainly be the extermination of the tribe. Great efforts, therefore, were being made to save the lad's life, to which end Gogoza, the kraal doctor, had prescribed a special medicine which was to be administered to a black dog an hour after sundown. If the dog died the chief's son would assuredly recover, provided, of course, he had not been bewitched by some powerful and malign enemy. If the dog lived, or if, despite the dog's death, the chief's son died, such sinister enchantment would be proved beyond shadow of doubt, and there would follow immediately a great beer-drink and smelling out of the evilly disposed person that had wrought this calamity.

"All which," said Napo, sagely, "brings to a conclusion that Gogoza, knowing the chief's son is sick to death and cannot recover, is seizing the occasion for killing an enemy of his own at the kraal."

"It seems to me," said Keshwan, "that these people will be thinking more of the chief's son than of a potful of rain, and mayhap they will expect me to cure him."

"And if you cannot cure him," said the Bushman, "the best thing to do will be to kill him, and forthwith contrive that the blame falls on Gogoza. There is a root here in this bag of which the juice, mixed with the blood of a white hen, would kill anybody."

Keshwan began turning over the problem carefully. It occurred to him that the profession of rain-making might easily lead an inexperienced wizard into complications for which he had not bargained.

"One thing," he said, "there can be no gainsaying, and that is that you, Bushman, cannot be of the party that visits this kraal."

"So I bethought me when we sent him to the drift," said Napo. "Else, if he comes, the woman will assuredly know him, as he himself said. It follows,

therefore, that you and I must go alone, and when we have done our doctorings and have taken our fee, we must meet Baroa at a spot to be agreed on and divide the spoil."

There was a long argument over this, Baroa objecting strongly. But it was his turn to be overruled now. In the end it was agreed to meet him after midnight at a spot about a mile from the kraal, in the direction their journey was taking them. He meanwhile, if he encountered anyone, was to be circumspect and alert, and to gather all that he could relating to the people and places of the district. Even the best wizards in those days were not above enhancing their professional stock-in-trade by attention to little details.

CHAPTER XII

Of the first divination by fowl's blood; of the discomfiture of Gogoza; of a cheap meal eaten in a death-chamber; of the passing of a chief's son; and of a plan that has some bearing on this history.

It was sundown when the travellers separated, and darkness was falling as the wizard and his companion entered Tindaba's kraal. The first thing they saw in the open space in front of the chief's hut was a black dog tethered to a stake. Squatting on the ground in front of the dog was an ancient individual with a kaross over his shoulders. There were brass rings in his ears, and a clay chaplet in his greasy wool, from which hung a number of cock's feathers. This personage was busy pounding some substance in a rough earthenware saucer, which he occasionally heated at a small fire at his elbow. Around and about him stood a curious crowd, eyeing the proceedings with sustained interest. Keshwan, putting a thing or two together, walked into the little circle, rattling the reed head-dress that towered up from his shoulders, and addressed the old man in the kaross.

"Gogoza, we give thee greeting!"

The old man looked up, startled.

"Who are ye, and whence come ye?" he asked, pausing in his occupation. "And how know ye that I am Gogoza?"

"Thou art Gogoza, the doctor of this kraal," said Keshwan. "I know it, because I too am a doctor and wizard. I am greater than thou. I am Dabazooki!" His chest swelled up and he rattled his reeds and shook the ratskin bags he was carrying about his waist. "I am Dabazooki! I am the greatest of wizards and enchanters! I make rain, I breed pestilence, I bring

fire, I give death to my enemies and peace to my friends, I walk in the footsteps of the earthquake and ride upon the storm! Bow down, ye people, and make obeisance, for I carry with me the power of life and death!"

There was a murmur of awe and astonishment. One had only to claim in that country to be capable of any devilry for everybody to believe it. There were, however, exceptions.

"How say you?" exclaimed Gogoza, leaving the saucer and straightening himself up. "Many there are that claim wizardry who are impostors. Prove to us that you are a wizard. He, he!" and he began to giggle. "Tell me, O wizard and death-dealer, for what purpose is this medicine being made, and why that black dog is tethered here? Tell me that, and we may believe you!"

Now this was positively the most fortunate test that could have been given to Keshwan, who jumped at it—and would have spoiled half the effect but for the cunning of Napo. Hitting Keshwan a surreptitious dig in the stomach to keep him quiet, the Dwarf stepped forward and said solemnly:

"O Gogoza, that is a hard and difficult question that you have set this wizard, for he is but newly come hither and has not even examined your medicines to see for what purpose they may be required. You in the same case, coming suddenly upon a strange medicine-maker, would assuredly give no answer save after you had first looked well into the medicine and put questions."

"Nay," said Gogoza, with a leer, "but this man claimeth to be the greatest of all wizards, whereas I make no such claim. Let him therefore, without examining my medicine, tell me for what purpose I make it, and we shall believe him."

"It is a hard test," answered Napo, giving Keshwan another dig, "and I doubt that even Dabazooki can come through it, great wizard that he is. Nevertheless, I will prepare his magic for him."

With that he squatted on the ground at a good distance from Gogoza and his rubbish, and drew a circle in the dust with his little finger.

"Fetch me a bowl of water and the blood of a fowl."

There was a murmur of awe-stricken interest, as the spectators crowded up to see what was in progress. Somebody ran for the water, and somebody else ran for the fowl, and everybody got on a tiptoe of expectation. Old Gogoza crowded up with the rest of them and looked on sourly.

"Child's play," he said, as the blood of a newly slaughtered chicken (the carcase of which Napo thoughtfully annexed) was sprinkled into the water. This done, Napo opened one of the ratskin bags and drew forth the leg-bone of a rat, and the corpse of a sand-beetle. These articles he immersed in the mixture of blood and water, drew them forth dripping, threw them in the air one after the other, and watched with bated breath where they fell in the circle he had drawn with his finger. They fell about six inches apart. Dipping his finger in the water, Napo drew a straight line across the circle, breaking it against each of the above objects.

"These be magicians!" said one of the spectators solemnly.

"As to that we shall see," put in Gogoza, sceptically.

"And now, O great wizard, breeder of death and maker of pestilence," said Napo, "deign to perform thy wizardry before thy children. Here is the bag."

Keshwan opened the bag, squatted beside the circle, and performed passes with his hands. Then he closed his eyes, let his tongue loll out of his mouth like a thirsty dog's, breathed hard, and muttered an incantation. Then he put his ear to the ground and listened. There was dead silence. After about two minutes Keshwan straightened himself up, rattled his reed framework, and began:

"My magic tells me, O Gogoza, and ye, children of the chief Tindaba, whose kraal this is——"

"*Ow!* How know you that this is Tindaba's kraal?" exclaimed one of the spectators. They were ready to credit anything to supernatural causes by this time.

"My magic tells me," pursued Keshwan, "that this doctor of Tindaba's kraal maketh a medicine to cure a man of a fever!"

"*Kwowk!*" came in a smothered chorus from the crowd.

"To cure a man of a fever, yea," said Gogoza, looking a bit foolish. "But what man, and by what means? Tell us that, O wizard!"

Keshwan went down on his face again, spat into the centre of the circle, licked up a little of the sand and chewed it, then put his ear to the dead beetle and listened hard. There was silence.

"My magic tells me that the sick man is the son of a cripple."

There was a cry of astonishment.

"He is a great wizard!"

"Of a surety he is wonderful!"

"My magic tells me," pursued Keshwan, swelling his chest, "that this man is the son of a cripple, who is also the chief of this kraal. My magic tells me that this medicine is to be given to a black dog, an hour after sundown. If the dog dies from this medicine the chief's son will live; but if the chief's son dies in despite of the dog, there will be a smelling out, since this doctor holdeth that in that case it will be proved that Tindaba's kraal is bewitched by an ill person."

Old Gogoza's eyes looked like dropping into his lap at this, and his face took on a cheap and ordinary appearance. It looked cheaper still a minute later, when Keshwan, spitting with great force and precision on the body of the dead beetle, observed carelessly:

"The dog will die and the chief's son will die also. Before moonrise he will be dead. Then I, Dabazooki, breeder of life and death, will tell by my magic who hath bewitched this kraal. Now lead me to the chief's son!"

To say that this pronouncement created a stir amongst the people would be to describe the sensation mildly. A babble of tongues got loose instantly, and the hubbub was so persistent that the chief himself came crawling out of his hut to inquire into it. He came on his hands and knees, dragging his crippled leg after him.

"A great wizard is here, O chief, a great doctor, a wonderful medicine man! He hath told everything concerning thee and thy son and the doctorings of Gogoza!" Everybody was gabbling at once. "He

hath foretold that thy son dies to-night! He hath promised to discover him that hath bewitched the kraal!"

The chief crawled into the ring of people. Napo noted that despite his infirmity, the result of an accident in the hunting-field, there was an appearance of strength and ability about him. His skin was of a lighter colour than was common in those parts, and his features were finer: the nose almost aquiline, the lips firm and narrow, the forehead high. Napo, who was a good judge of character in his way, thought there was in this man the makings of a ruler who could be both firm and merciful.

"Who is this wizard that says my son dies?" asked Tindaba, plaintively. "There is much trouble toward if that happens. Let me see this wizard!"

"I am he, Tindaba the Cripple," said Keshwan, advancing.

"Then if in truth you be a wizard of good parts," said Tindaba, "save my son's life rather than let him perish!"

"Nay," said Keshwan, "there is a limit even to my wizardry, since the spell of enchantment hath by now worked too far and thy son must die. Yet I would see him now, privately with this my companion, the Dwarf, so that I may perchance contrive a medicine there in the hut that shall make thy son's strength pass into thee, O chief, when his fathers call him. Bring me a gourd of milk, a platter of roasted grain, a little goat's flesh, well-cooked, and a pot of beer. With these I propitiate the spirits."

"See that these things are brought swiftly," commanded Tindaba; and in next to no time Giant and Dwarf were contemplating as good a meal as they had sat down to for many a day.

"There is some merit in your witchcraft," said Napo, beneath his breath, as they were followed by the rabble in the direction of a hut near by.

"So the Bushman will think when we tell him of this feast," said Keshwan, with a laugh.

They went into the hut alone, Napo bearing a rush taper that was given him, and Keshwan carrying the food. Not to exhibit too indecent a hurry to set to on

the latter, however, the renowned magician paused ere he passed in and made a grand incantation over the goat's flesh and the beer. This thoroughly convinced the crowd and made Gogoza ill with envy.

In a corner of the hut lay the dying man. His head rested upon a wooden head-rest, and his limbs were stretched out on a rush mat. Beside him, licking his limp hand, lay a starved-looking dog that whined piteously. There was nothing in the hut save a calabash of thick milk, from which the fever-stricken wretch had been drinking thirstily. Just now he was unconscious and babbled in delirium. He thrashed his arms about wearily, and the dog whined again as he did it.

In such a place and in such circumstances—severed from human aid, while wretched impostors outside made pretence with their bones and bladders and other magical tomfoolery—many a man had been left to die. Minor complaints were curable by herbs and blood-letting; but of the real science of medicine, or anything approaching it, these people and their doctors were blankly ignorant. What they did not know—which was almost everything—they put down to witchcraft; so that, while this man was galloping to his death from a fever which a little common sense would have cured at the outset, the highest medical authority in the neighbourhood could think of nothing better to do than administer a dose of poison to a dog! And the society of that time saw nothing incongruous in it, either, and would be perfectly satisfied that the very best that medical skill could accomplish had been done, if the dog died, and the man, too.

Keshwan opened the bag into which Baroa had thrust an exceedingly potent and magic root, the squeezed juice of which, with or without the blood of a white hen, would have been more than enough to send the chief's son to the bosom of his fathers in five minutes or less. But Napo, holding the rush light above the dying man, peered into his face, and drew back.

"No need of your simples, wizard," he said, with a grunt. "In less than an hour he will be dead."

Keshwan was not displeased to fasten up the bag again.

The two sat down in a corner of the hut and watched the unhappy wretch thrashing out his life with his thin arms, and listened to the dog whining. Over the rush-light they consumed the food, and talked out a plan that had occurred to the mind of Napo. It was concerned with the discovery of that evil person who had bewitched the chief's son, and showed that a smart wizard, if he knew his business, need not allow any circumstance to pass him by without extracting some profit out of it. In this case the circumstance had to do with personal revenge, which, be it said, was a deciding factor in nine-tenths of all the wizardry that was ever practised in the world.

"The plan is a good one," said Keshwan, when Napo had finished. "Let us summon the chief and see whether these people have heart to follow it."

Napo glanced at the form lying there on the mat.

"Shortly," he said. "Better that he die first."

So they waited for a little while, and as they waited Keshwan took some of the rubbish out of one of the ratskin bags, mixed it with leavings of the food, rolled it into a ball and rubbed it on the floor, and finally placed it on a platter with a few drops of milk.

"Medicine for the chief," he said.

"Then better that he apply it outwardly than eat it," said Napo—"unless he has the stomach of a crocodile."

"It will be of the same effect rubbed on the soles of the feet, and that will sound better," said Keshwan, thoughtfully. "Possibly we may contrive, however, that Gogoza eats some."

"Better that Vokwana could mix some of it with that goat he stole," said Napo, laughing. "Thereby if a man is not cured by your medicines, at least his enemies would be saved some trouble."

There came a sound from the mat, and the dog rose up and left the prostrate body and went slinking into a corner. There it threw up its head, sniffed, stiffened its lean carcase, and gave vent to a dismal howl.

"Finished," said Napo, setting down the rush light. "Let us go."

CHAPTER XIII

Of the second divination by fowl's blood; of the smelling out of a most evil person, and the declaration of war that followed; how the Dwarf and the Giant took counsel of a benign spirit; and how matters were laid in train for a great battle.

THEY passed out of the hut, to find the chief and the people already awaiting them. A fire had been lit in front of Tindaba's hut. He was reclining near to it, surrounded by his councillors to the number of a dozen, and beside him squatted Gogoza, contemplating the carcase of the dog. It had died in the most satisfactory manner two minutes after the medicine was given it; but Gogoza looked up somewhat uneasily, nevertheless, when the Dwarf and the Giant strode forward. The renowned wizard wasted no time in preliminary formalities.

"Go thou, Gogoza, into the hut of the chief's son," commanded Keshwan, "and report straightway as to the efficacy of thy medicine."

Old Gogoza rose up shakily and tottered off, wishing that someone else had been chosen for the mission. In two minutes he was back.

"Thy son is dead, O chief!"

There was a loud wail from someone in the crowd, and a woman began beating her breasts.

"My son is dead!" said Tindaba. "Wizardry hath slain my son!"

"Ay, he is dead by wizardry," said Keshwan solemnly. "And him that hath slain him I will reveal to thee. Fetch me a live goat!"

A goat was brought.

"Slay it!"

Someone drew a spear expeditiously across the animal's throat and it uttered its last bleat on earth.

"Bring two fat fowls and a basket of corn," said Keshwan.

They were brought.

"Slay the fowls and place their bodies in the basket of corn."

It was done.

"Bring me now a basket of new eggs, and a gourd full of milk."

These things were fetched. Keshwan placed them in various positions round and about each other. He would have called for a bullock probably, and would have got it, but reflected that with this provender the load they would have to carry would be heavy enough. Keshwan drew a circle around the dead fowls, the goat, and the farm produce. Then he sucked two of the eggs, took a good drink of the milk, and commanded Napo to do the same. They were very much refreshed by the proceeding. Next he called for a gourd of water and a few live coals. The coals he placed in a hollow scooped in the sand, making three heaps of shining coals. Then he walked round the three heaps, rattling his crockery crate, smacking his ratskin bags, shaking and twisting his body till the clay stripes made him look like a leaping panther, and generally comporting himself in the approved style of a wizard with something on his mind. In the middle of this performance he stopped stock still and set up a howl like that of a sick dog. Everybody was electrified. Gogoza shook till his teeth rattled.

Seizing one of the slaughtered fowls, Keshwan squeezed from it two drops of blood, at the same time crying:

"He that hath bewitched this kraal, and slain the chief's son, let his blood dry in his veins and his body perish!"

The blood dropped on a live coal and there was a loud sizzle. A groan went up from the spectators. Grabbing the gourd of milk, Keshwan spattered a drop or two over the second heap of coals.

"He that hath bewitched this kraal and slain the

chief's son, let the milk of his cattle dry up and his children starve!"

Another hiss as the coal went out, and another groan from the astonished people. Keshwan seized the gourd of water and soused it over the third heap of coals.

"He that hath bewitched this kraal and slain the chief's son, let his rivers dry up and his crops perish and his people die of thirst!"

There was a great hiss followed by a cloud of steam, and the earth shook with the groan of the people.

"And now, O chief," said Keshwan, "answer me these questions I am about to put, and give no more than the bare answers. Is there hereabouts a chief who lords it with cruelty and oppression over this kraal and several others?"

"There is such a chief," said Tindaba.

"Is he a chief famed for the wisdom of his judgments and for the injustice thereof, whereby he invariably contrives to profit?"

"He is such a chief."

At this point Napo interrupted below his breath:

"Pish, fool, make more use of your magic, else will they suspect something."

Keshwan obediently got down on the ground again and listened to the dead beetle. Then he took up one of the blackened coals, spat on it, and drew a ring in the sand with the coal and saliva. Into this ring he peered intently for a full minute. Then:

"Answer, O chief; is there one hereabouts stronger than thou who seeketh trouble with thee in the matter of the succession?"

"There is such a one."

"Doth he live in that direction at a kraal less than a day's journey hence?"

"He liveth there where thou sayest."

Keshwan drew out of his bag a piece of the poisonous root that Baroa had intended for the chief's son. Taking a flat stone he bruised the root till the juice oozed from the fibre. The crowd watched with bated breath. It is wonderful what a fascination the profession of wizardry has for some people. He took three drops of water, three drops of milk, and three drops

of the fowl's blood, and mixed them with the juice of the root in a stone saucer. But he was so long about all this that Napo gave him a surreptitious dig.

"Make haste, with less mummery," he whispered, "else that fool Baroa will be coming hither to search for us."

Keshwan thereupon called for a live coal, which he dropped, hissing and spluttering, into this magical decoction. Then he rose up and cried in a loud voice:

"O chief, is that man of whom I have just asked thee named Vokwana?"

"He is named Vokwana," said Tindaba.

"Then, O chief and people," said Keshwan, "know ye that of my magic in that name I reveal to you him who hath slain the chief's son and bewitched the kraal, and would bring you all to the death shortly!"

Gogoza, who had never dreamt of this, gave a strangled gulp and breathed hard. The chief sat up as straight as his leg would permit him to. Everybody gaped in open-mouthed astonishment, and Keshwan, profiting by the sensation his words had caused, exclaimed:

"As I have told you who it is that hath bewitched you, so do I tell you now how to break the enchantment, and that is by war!"

"By war!" came in a shout from three hundred throats.

"By war!" repeated Keshwan, shaking his reed contraption and ratskin bags. "O chief and people, are ye ready to take shield and spear, and go up against this man and slay him with all his people?"

"We are ready!" came in a roar from the crowd.

"Good!" cried Keshwan. "Then suffer his tyrannies no longer, but go up against him to-morrow night and wipe him out and all with him. For I tell you that he hath bewitched this kraal and slain thy son, O chief, so that thou, being tributary to him, mayest come for a judgment on the matter of the succession, whereon he will decide in such way that the whole of thy substance shall be eaten up, and thy kraal burned, and thy people driven away!"

Such a scene as there was after this one might never see in a lifetime. The young men of the kraal wanted to go right off and attack Vokwana; which they might have done with success as far as he personally was concerned, had they known it, since the old swindler had gorged himself well on the flesh of the goat and was almost past moving. Others counselled delay, that they might prepare themselves and perhaps gain the assistance of a neighbouring tribe, which would share the plunder. The old men demanded a council, and the chief consented, agreeing that it should be called that very night. There was war and bloodshed and rebellion in the air, and it was quite plain that Keshwan had struck a slumbering chord in the breasts of these oppressed people. The tyrannies of Vokwana had been endured long enough, and here was a good pretext for rising against them once and for ever.

In the midst of the excitement Napo sprang up, holding his arm aloft, and there was dead silence.

"Dabazooki the wizard speaks truth," he cried, "and in earnest thereof I pledge thee that he and I shall go up with thy people against this man and slay him. Hark now! Because of his great wizardry, and because of the infirmity of your chief, Dabazooki shall first doctor me secretly against defeat and shall then appoint me the general to command you. Thus do we offer our services to aid thee, O people of Tindaba, in securing freedom from this oppression. Debate the matter for a space while we withdraw. Let none follow us. We go to take counsel by magic and incantation. In an hour we shall return, then if ye wish our aid I shall lay bare my plans for the attack, and if ye wish it not we shall go on our way in peace. It is said!"

Without another word the two stalked off into the darkness; and nothing more sudden and dramatic had ever been seen in that kraal or in the country.

They went with a sedate dignity till they had passed from the circle of the huts and were half-way down the hillside, then they ran.

They ran swiftly as bucks, and spoke scarce a word till they had covered a mile of distance. Then Napo pulled up short, and uttered a low, penetrating cry like

the call of a jackal. Away to their right came the hoot of a night-owl.

"It is he," said Keshwan, moving in the direction of the sound.

The moon had come up by this time, and before long they glimpsed the creeping form of the Bushman clambering out of the donga where he had lain hid.

"Great things have been afoot since we left you," said Napo, "and if I mistake not there will be still greater ere long. Listen, Bushman," and he went over the whole story, down to the moment of their leaving the council.

"Now the matter stands thus," said Napo. "We return together towards the kraal and you, Baroa, shall remain hidden, but within earshot, while we go up to receive the answer of the council. If that answer is against us and they would have us go on our journey, I shall rise up and utter a cry, and you will know that shortly we shall rejoin you and pursue our journey. If the decision is that we stay and go up with the people against Vokwana, I shall utter two cries. Then, hearing that, you must go straightway, with great speed, to the kraal of Vokwana, and there remain as a spy to us till daybreak. At dawn some of our soldiers shall bring you food and receive a report from you. They will return to us, and others shall be sent to meet you secretly from time to time during the day, and receive reports of Vokwana's movements and the situation of his men about the kraal. Then an hour before moonrise we, with our fighting men, will come to you and be ready for the attack."

Thus it was arranged. They talked over all the details of the plan, walking slowly in the direction of Tindaba's kraal; and after a time Napo and the Giant left Baroa concealed in the reeds beside the stream where the woman had drawn water. The two warriors returned up the hill together, passed in between the circle of huts, and came again before Tindaba and his people.

"We have come for the decision, O chief and people," said Napo.

Tindaba, huddled upon his mat, stretched his hand

out over the circle of squatting councillors and the ring of men that surrounded them in the darkness.

"We have decided, O wizard and O soldier, to accept your aid and to leave the direction of the battle in your hands. But this I say, that if this battle fails, and we are defeated, you, O wizard and O soldier, shall be brought to me captive and shall fall to my spear."

"That is a condition I myself would impose in a like case," said Napo, whereat there was a murmur of approval. "But have no fear of a defeat. There in the veld yonder Dabazooki just now made a magic and took counsel of the spirits of our fathers, and doctored me according to our secret rites. This, then, has befallen, that of Dabazooki's magic one is placed by the spirits of our fathers ready to bring news of the doings and dispositions of Vokwana. To him that awaits our orders and must fly now with the fleetness of a spirit straight to Vokwana's kraal, I give a signal."

He raised his arm to the sky and stood motionless for a moment. Then he gave utterance to a long, low, penetrating wail, which twice went out over the veld in a rush of eerie sound that thrilled his hearers to their marrows.

"Hark!" said Napo; and there came back out of the distance, twice repeated, the same thrilling and mysterious sound.

"He hath answered and is already gone," said Napo. "At dawn two soldiers shall go unarmed towards Vokwana's kraal as though searching for a lost ox. There they shall lie hidden on a hill over against the kraal, when there shall come to them this messenger called up from among the spirits, and they shall give him food and bring report to us here. He shall be known for his yellowness and apparent age, and for the smallness of his stature. And now, O chief and people, let me unfold my plan."

Far into the night they talked. It appeared that Tindaba could muster at the most some two hundred and fifty fighting men, and there were in addition about a hundred youths, who could follow the regiment carrying a reserve of arms. All reports agreed that Vokwana could command not less than a

thousand men, but of these it was considered that possibly a hundred would be posted round and about his domain at the kraal outposts. Of the remainder it was certain that the majority could be caught sleeping and unprepared, if the approach to the kraal could be effected without giving the guards time to arouse the kraal. In fact, it was clear to Napo that the very security in which Vokwana and his people dwelt was the measure of their weakness against a surprise attack. At the same time, he knew that the odds were heavy, and the probabilities entirely against taking the kraal without very severe slaughter of his own men. He remembered, too, the stockade that ran through the centre of Vokwana's kraal. Here there would be a certain check on the advance of his regiment, which, if prolonged, would enable the fighting men inside to gather for resistance. Napo knew that, if he lost very many of his men before the stockade was taken, he would lose the fight also.

In fact, with such odds to contend against, everything depended on the fighting qualities of the men he was to lead. But on that score the Dwarf did not trouble himself overmuch. A fight was a fight, any way, and this one he resolved should be as good a one as he could make it, since he himself had a grudge to pay off against Vokwana. Determined that Vokwana should lack nothing by way of interest when the time came, Napo, having discussed the minutest details of the attack, borrowed a mat, rolled himself up in it beside the fire, and sought refreshment in sleep.

CHAPTER XIV

Tells of the preparations to overthrow a tyrant; of the night march of Tindaba's men; of a great battle at the kraal of Wisdom; how the Bushman saved the situation; and how the Dwarf repaid a coward's blow with interest.

It was late in the forenoon when Napo awoke, for they had let him sleep long. Things had gone well in the meanwhile. The two soldiers dispatched with the food for Baroa had returned, overawed to find that the ghostly visitant from the other world had actually appeared to them as promised, had eaten of the food with an unearthly appetite, and had told them minutely all the movements in and around Vokwana's kraal. This sent up Keshwan's reputation as a wizard by some degrees, and made Gogoza swallow hard when he heard it. As a matter of fact, the Bushman had crawled under cover of the darkness to within a few feet of the guard stationed near the main cattle-enclosure. There he had listened to a desultory conversation, in which, to the dismay of Tindaba when he heard of it, the name of Tindaba and his people figured. Not very much was said, but enough to show that some impending attack on Tindaba was a subject of discussion already at Vokwana's kraal. The illness of the chief's son was known, and evidently only his death was awaited to create a pretext for Vokwana's interference in the matter of the succession.

That this was so, and that Vokwana had some special solicitude for the lad's health, was shown by an incident which occurred later in the day. For, as evening was drawing on, and preparations for the night's events were nearing completion, there appeared coming up the hillside towards the kraal a man who was recognised at once as one of Vokwana's soldiers. It was, of course, impos-

sible to refuse him admittance without exciting suspicion, and equally impossible that he could enter without seeing in a moment that some rebellious enterprise was afoot. Napo, who was told of his coming, made up his mind to act accordingly.

Straight into the kraal the soldier walked, and was instantly accosted by Napo himself. There was a look of recognition, for this man, in point of fact, was one of the soldiers that had hustled the three travellers down the hill after the judgment on the goat.

"What do you here, Dwarf?" he asked, with an insolent laugh.

"I wait on the chief's son who is ill of a fever," said Napo.

"It is of him I have come to hear," said the soldier. "Vokwana, being distressed because of his illness"—here he laughed again—"sends me to inquire if he goes on well or is worse?"

"Come you and see him," said Napo.

The man started forward, then his eye fell on assegais and spears stacked against the side of a hut.

"What means this?" he demanded sharply. Several men began to appear, armed to the teeth. "Whence come these men to be armed as if ready for battle?" asked the messenger in surprise. He looked round from one to the other and was amazed at their sullen countenances. "It seemeth to me, Dwarf, there is mischief afoot," he began; but he got no further, not even to the utterance of a cry. The man had turned slightly to the side, as if searching the face of Napo for an answer. Then suddenly, without word or warning, once again Napo put forth his gigantic strength as he had done against the soldier who stood guard over the prison-hut in Kolwane's kraal. There was a leap like that of a panther, a twisting of dark forms, the hideous snapping of something, followed by a dreadful gurgle. Next second the soldier lay in a huddled and lifeless heap.

"The first blow!" said Napo, calmly. "Take him into the hut yonder, that he may inquire there of the chief's son!"

A gasp of amazement went up from those who saw this prodigy of strength; indeed, so amazed and be-

wildered were they, and so incredulous that the soldier could be dead, that they hesitated for a moment to take up the body and carry it into the hut.

"Quick!" commanded Napo. "Go one of you straightway to Vokwana with this word: that his messenger, being bitten of a snake, is tended by one of our women, but that Tindaba sends greeting on behalf of his son, from whom the fever is abating. Let the message be delivered swiftly, else others will be sent hither to look for this dog."

A soldier by name Meputu was sent off with the message, and as it chanced this incident had a sequel that did Tindaba's cause some good.

Napo, accompanied by Keshwan, whom he had created his chief of staff, went round the kraal to see that all the preparations were complete. They visited the smithy's forge just inside the kraal gate, where spear-heads were being sharpened and reed assegais bladed and made ready. Keshwan, on whom the duties of staff officer sat with a better grace than his honours as a wizard, had seen to it that every shield and weapon in the kraal was brought forth and overhauled. The collection was not an imposing one, for the weapons of that day were primitive. The shields were of ox-hide stretched on light but strong frames, about four feet long and elliptical in shape. Not everybody had a shield in that kraal, and some that were there had seen better days, for Tindaba's herds were not numerous enough for many oxen to be killed for military equipment. Every man, however, possessed several throwing assegais and a spear, and all of them were expert wielders of the knobstick. This weapon, which could tell many a tale of broken skulls in battle, was used also for the chase, and was often hurled with precision at a running buck over a considerable distance. As the fighting in those days was done at close quarters the primitive armoury just described was perhaps sufficient. Nevertheless, all civilised and humane people must commiserate these poor savages in not possessing weapons of destruction that at one stroke could blow a whole regiment into fragments and create some hundreds of widows and orphans in a moment.

In one corner of the kraal Napo and the Giant paused to watch some women and boys making a number of darts out of reeds weighted with brass wire at one end—the women and some of the head-men having given their bangles for this purpose—and tufted at the other end with grass soaked in fat. These, according to the plan formed by Napo, were to be carried by women and boys to the number of a hundred, for a purpose which will presently be seen.

Napo regarded the preparations with satisfaction, and when he discovered later that Gogoza had made a medicine out of goat's blood mixed with the gall of a field-rat, and had sprinkled some of the soldiers with it, he felt that victory was assured.

They had just returned from the inspection when Meputu, the messenger dispatched to Vokwana's kraal, came back. He went straight to where Tindaba sat in consultation with his head-man, and as he came it was noticed that blood coursed down his neck and dripped on his shoulders.

"Thus was Tindaba's messenger received by Vokwana, dog that he is," said Meputu, stepping forward. He exposed his head, and the spectators saw that both his ears had been cut off. A growl of rage went up at the indignity.

"And thus," said the soldier, "Vokwana bade me reply: Tell Tindaba and his people that my spears bite deeper than their snakes, and if this soldier of mine pays his life to the venom of their kraal, ten of Tindaba's men shall answer with their heads on the morrow!"

"And ten hundred of Vokwana's shall answer with theirs this night!" cried Napo.

There was a great shout at this, and the man that had lost his ears at the tyrant's hands raised up his right hand and cried:

"O Dwarf, I, Meputu, swear to be at your right hand in the thickest of the fight!"

"Then make ready, all of you," said Napo, "for we march out before the moon rises."

The final preparations, after a silent meal, for which all were gathered in the *lekhotla* before the chief's hut, did not take many minutes. The soldiers were mar-

shalled in two sections. Behind them, under the leadership of an aged head-man, who had very particular instructions as to their duties, were the boys and women carrying the tufted reeds. A dozen of the boys carried clay bowls in which burning coals were kept alive. The crippled chief sat at the door of his hut, with Gogoza, watching the preparations for departure.

"We go to bring thee victory!" said Napo, saluting, as the soldiers filed past.

"And we go," said Keshwan, "to carry a dead goat to the kraal of Wisdom," and as nobody but himself and Napo understood the allusion, everybody thought he must be inspired.

Silently but swiftly the regiment marched over the veld in the direction of Vokwana's kraal, five miles away. The night was still and dark, and there was a heavy mist over the valleys. For this Napo gave thanks. It would serve to obscure their movements when the moon rose and the advance was made against the enemy. The regiment made a wide detour in order to avoid a cattle-post, where it was known a small company of Vokwana's soldiers was established. Word had come in from the Bushman that at sundown the guards had been withdrawn from their posts in a northerly direction, driving their cattle in to the main kraal. This left a way open from that quarter, and thither Napo directed his men. But they had to walk warily, nevertheless, and in some places the uneven nature of the ground made the going slow. At last, however, Napo, at the head of the regiment, felt the ground rising, and knew that they were almost within striking distance of the kraal. Indeed, not far beyond, in the mist and darkness, cattle could be heard lowing, and a dog barked. As the dog ceased there came from away off, to the right of the kraal, a faint sound, several times repeated, like the calling of a night-hawk.

"Baroa the Bushman!" whispered Napo in Keshwan's ear. "Order the regiment to stand here moving not by an inch while I take those that bear the torches."

Swiftly and silently the boys and women were assembled and led away round the foot of the hill in the

direction of that sound. Napo was absent about half an hour, and he returned alone.

"They are disposed in a good position," he said. "Soon Vokwana's soldiers will be sleeping. Come!"

The moon was just rising as the advance began again. Presently the surface of the veld was bathed in a pale and diluted glory. Great masses of silvery mist hung about the hollows and soaked the stunted grass through which the soldiers moved. Napo hoped that the mist would endure long enough for his men to reach the hilltop, and in this he was not disappointed. The regiment spread out in a semicircle and advanced in extended order. They went at first slowly, then in short rushes from cover to cover, each man bounding along almost on all fours.

Presently they found themselves ascending the knob or kopje on which the kraal was situated. A signal was given and the ranks closed up. Napo's tactics were new to these people and he saw that he had to keep them well in hand. To surround the kraal with any hope of capturing it that way was impossible with so small a force. His plan was to concentrate on one place of entrance and rush it; but not before the hidden band under the guidance of the Bushman had begun its work.

Arrived at a spot within fifty yards of the kraal entrance, an order was given and every man lay flat on his stomach in the grass. Then Napo uttered twice in succession the yelp of a wolf. There was silence for as much as five minutes. Then from beyond the kraal came an answering yelp. It was Baroa. Next second the watchers saw an arrow of light flame feebly across the moonlit sky, describe a half-circle and fall downwards on the kraal. Another followed, another and another. Then smoke arose somewhere, there was a little spurt of flame, a hut in the centre of the kraal was burning.

Napo gave the word, and his regiment dashed forward. The kraal-gate was wrenched at and trampled down. The men poured in and were within the outer circle of the huts. At the same instant someone in the centre huts raised a shout:

"The kraal burns!"

Swiftly those little arrows of fire rained down on the dry thatch. Now a tongue of flame leaped up, crackled, was blown back by the wind and became a sheet of fire and fury. Baroa had timed his attack well.

There was wild uproar in an instant, and the narrow spaces between the huts were filled with running men and shrieking women. Then Napo gave the order for half his men to charge over the stockade, and the fight began.

At first the dazed and bewildered soldiers of Vokwana did not realise that they were being attacked. All they knew as they poured out of the huts was that fire was blazing above and around them. Many of them rushed out unarmed and attempted to climb the palisade, mistaking Napo's men for their own people coming in from the outer circle to help them.

Then a cry rose up: "We are attacked, we are attacked! It is war!"

Simultaneously the inmates of the outer huts poured into the narrow spaces, some armed, some rushing helplessly this way and that. They were met by Napo's men and stabbed, while those trying to climb the palisade were speared or clubbed with the heavy knobsticks. The fire in the central huts spread with frightful rapidity, sending a glare into the sky and lighting up the struggling masses of people. In a few minutes the huts in the centre of the enclosure were a raging mass of flames, in the midst of which many unable to escape perished miserably.

Some, however, when the first shock of surprise was over, realising the position, seized spear and shield and rushed for the palisade. Then the fight became general; and fierce and bloody it was.

Napo's men fought silently. Hardly a shout was raised by them, and what noise of battle there was came from the beleaguered wretches in the burning kraal. The object of the insiders was to get out and get out quickly. Once outside there was some hope that they might form up and give battle to the besiegers, or escape over the veld. The object of the attackers was to prevent this: hence the fiercest fighting raged round the entrance to the palisade. Here men fell in heaps, while others, made

desperate by the heat and the roar of flames, battled with madness upon their bodies.

Napo, Keshwan, and the man Meputu stood in the forefront of the fight, right before the opening of the palisade. They fought with the fury of demons. The great spear of Keshwan flashed up and flashed down, and the shield of Napo once more played round his body at every thrust and stab, as Keshwan had seen it in that fight between them after the murder of Kolwane's drovers. How many fell to the spear of each neither could have told you, but they saw the pile of dead growing round them. Many of their own men fell on that ghastly heap to rise no more. One of them, Meputu himself, came near to doing so, for he fell and was speared through the shoulder as he wrestled with one of Vokwana's soldiers. But he was up again after a desperate combat, though not before yelling out to the people of Vokwana that "for each ear he had taken a dozen men!" And as one of these men was the self-same individual that had hacked off his ears at the bidding of Vokwana, there was poetic justice in the achievement.

Napo and Keshwan were wounded also, but they fought on. Truth to tell, they fought and slew almost mechanically. Never a blow missed and not one that went down before their brawn and muscle rose again. Keshwan had his own pile of dead and dying, and towered up like a lion amongst them, shaking his great head, gnashing his jaws, and stabbing with such fury as almost to exhaust even his giant strength. As for Napo, that diminutive but fiery warrior could scarce be seen in the whirl of black forms that raged around him. Behind and around his flanks the more eager spirits of Tindaba's men fought over him, thrusting above his head, while between this press of friends in the rear and of foes before he came near to being knocked down and trampled, if he was not speared.

Farther along the palisade fierce hand-to-hand fights were raging between groups of attackers and defenders. Many of Vokwana's men had succeeded in clambering over the palisade, and these were inextricably mixed up with the attackers in the narrow passages between the

outer huts. It was difficult to distinguish friend from foe, and in many a fierce onslaught Vokwana's men fell to their own steel. It was a bold stroke of Napo's to force the fighting into the heart of the kraal, but events justified it. The attackers, knowing their business, and acting on a concerted plan, kept their heads, while the defenders, terrified by the suddenness of the onslaught, fought in a blind fury of confusion.

To add to the tumult, women rushed shrieking from the huts and thronged hither and thither amongst the fighting masses. Many of them fell before the spears of friend or foe, it mattered nothing which, since none could distinguish. Moreover, in those days the non-combatant was not recognised, and, since women in many a battle fought side by side with men, sex was no bar to slaughter. Nevertheless, Napo had given orders that as far as possible the women were to be spared; and to that fact many of them owed their lives.

While the fight was raging around the palisade the fire was gathering volume and fury inside, so that those still prisoned among the burning huts saw that they must either die in the flames or risk death by the spear. Someone shouted a rally, and a body of men gathered to force their way through the palisade. For this Napo was prepared; yet he knew that the crucial moment of the fight had come. Shouting for reinforcements to hold the gate, he leaped on one side just as the rush began. His men, captained by Keshwan, closed up in a dense circle, but the pressure of the fighting in the narrow lanes behind broke it and scattered them. Perceiving their opportunity, the defenders made a combined rush, and before Keshwan could marshal his force again they were streaming through. Attackers and defenders saw what was afoot simultaneously, and in the next instant everyone seemed to converge on that small and crowded spot where Keshwan and Napo stood.

The scene that followed baffles description. But it was soon over. For a few perilous moments it looked as though the defenders would break through—would break through, gain the outer approaches to the kraal, and turn the tables on the invaders by hemming them in amongst the burning huts. Keshwan called for a rally in turn,

but the pressure of the fighting mob was too great, and nobody could get near him. Napo, wielding his spear with the fury of madness, cried for men to follow, and dashed into the centre of the gateway. Men went down on either side of him, and he strove like a demon, but was pressed back. Then suddenly those in the inner circle raised a great cry:

"We are attacked from behind! There is another army!"

Half the defenders swung round, the other half fought on, so that the two sections faced each other, and many fell before the blows of friends. Keshwan, towering above the swirling mass of black forms, saw what had happened and gave a great shout:

"Well done, Bushman! Nobly done, little monkey!"

For there, in the red light of the blazing huts, was Baroa leading his small company of youths, women, and old men. Most of them were armed only with knob-sticks. Some had snatched blazing reeds from the huts and were spreading the flames here and there. Others were hurling themselves like madmen on the masses of Vokwana's men, who, caught in the trap, were breaking into terror-stricken groups and flying here and there.

Just what happened after that neither Napo nor Keshwan ever knew. There were a great shouting and rushing this way and that, a darting of black forms over the stockade, where many fell to rise no more, cries for mercy, and a leaping of maddened men in and about the burning ruins. The confusion seemed to die down with amazing suddenness. Only a group here and there kept up the fight; or perhaps a hand-to-hand combat between two could be seen in the red-lit passages between the huts. Shouts from outside told that the fugitives were escaping, and that some of them were being pursued. Soon even the huts in the outer circle caught fire from the flying sparks, and Napo and his men began hurriedly to withdraw, knowing their victory to be complete. But before the last man—and that was Napo himself—left the burning kraal one incident occurred which seemed to place a seal on the triumph of that short and bloody fight.

For here, staggering out of his stronghold on the

carpet of dead bodies which were soon to be food for the devouring flames, came the chief Vokwana, wild-eyed and bleeding from many a wound. He came, without seeing him, straight to where Napo stood; and the Dwarf waited for him.

Vokwana grasped a spear that was red with blood and its shaft charred, for he had fought desperately in amongst the burning huts. Yet Napo, disregarding this weapon, lowered his own, and went straight for the chief with his open hand.

"It is I, Dwarf," he cried, in a loud voice. "You, O Vokwana, struck me but yesterday with the open hand, and with the open hand I return the blow! Now fight to the death!"

The blow of his hand fell full on the other's face, and the chief reeled. He raised his spear, stumbled amongst the dead bodies, slipped, fell and rolled over upon his back. He never rose. There was a sudden roar of flame, as one of the huts collapsed and the palisade itself caught fire. A tongue of flame shot out through the gateway: and the last that was seen of Vokwana the tyrant was a writhing black form, the last that was heard of him a wild shriek for mercy.

The next moment Napo was outside the kraal, and the fight was over.

CHAPTER XV

Tells how Napo established a new people, gave them a new name, and won from them a promise; how Golden Glory called the three travellers to resume their journey; how Letchla bade them a sorrowful farewell; and how they marched on in a land where there were no trousers.

THE fight was over, but the cost was a heavy one. Of Napo's two hundred and fifty men over a hundred were slain and many wounded. Of the old men, women, and boys who had followed the Bushman's heroic dash, and had so turned the scale, half were dead. It was a high price to pay for victory.

Napo assembled the remnant of his little regiment and marched them back to Tindaba's kraal. But first he did a prudent thing. He divided the oxen in the cattle-kraal, and they numbered some hundreds. Over one half he set a guard in Tindaba's name, instructing them to drive the cattle in next morning. The other half he divided into droves, which he sent forthwith in several directions as a peace offering and token of Tindaba's fealty to the fifteen- and twenty-mile potentates round the neighbourhood. He knew full well that, unless there was a voluntary division of the spoil, the fifteen- and twenty-milers would come down on Tindaba with righteous severity to punish him for exterminating Vokwana. Half the cattle divided up amongst them would keep them quiet. He also sent messengers to every one of the five-milers over whom Vokwana had lorded it, giving them a beast each, and summoning them to a council at Tindaba's kraal next morning. This showed good judgment on his part, as will be seen.

When the victorious regiment returned there was jubilation at the kraal. Tindaba had been dragged out

on the hillside near by and had watched the conflagration from a distance, while Gogoza performed minor miracles, by virtue of which he claimed afterwards that the battle was won. Keshwan let him have it that way, since it pleased the old humbug; and, after all, there was nothing to be gained by a dispute on the matter. But Gogoza secretly looked with awe and admiration on the travelling wizard, and by and by came with a request to be shown just how the sorcery with the live coals and the fowls and produce could be set going. The people also gave great admiration to Napo, and the chief, Tindaba, publicly thanked him—not forgetting Keshwan and the Bushman—for ridding the countryside of the pestilential tyrannies of Vokwana. In short, the three travellers were made much of, and spent a week or two at the kraal eating all they wanted and resting.

On the day after the fight there was a great *pitso*, or council, between Tindaba and his advisers and the petty chiefs and theirs. But before this there was the ceremony of burying the chief's son.

A funeral was a big event among those savages, and they enjoyed it as much as we enjoy funerals to-day. A deceased nobody was treated, of course, with no public respect; but when the corpse had been an important person everybody went to the funeral, and there was a great show. It was usual to bury a person almost as soon as he was dead, but the trouble with Vokwana had made it necessary in this case to depart from the custom. The lamentations had to be postponed for the same reason; but now that the fight was over these were got in full swing and could be heard for a mile or more. People who had never even spoken to the chief's son came to the hut where the body lay and lamented. They did this at the top of their voices, and brought other strangers along who had never seen him; and for some hours there was a grand lamentation, which was thoroughly enjoyed by everybody. These people had no tombstones on which to record a man's virtues, but this ceremony served instead. Everybody rose up, one after the other, and praised the deceased, and of course each person that did so discovered a new quality he had possessed and for which he merited distinction. The relatives sat

around and were startled to think how little they had appreciated the deceased while he was alive. Before the ceremony was over everyone was convinced that a spotless white angel had just left the world, and wondered how the deceased had managed to conceal his virtues so long. It is the same with us nowadays. While we are alive we may be pretty bad, or fairly good, or even tolerably holy; but whatever we are, we can be sure of being a great deal better when we are thoroughly dead.

After the lamentations the body was brought out of the hut through a hole in the wall opposite to the door. It was carried in an ox-hide, doubled up in a sitting posture. Then it was taken in procession to a spot beyond the kraal boundaries where a hole had been dug. It was a round hole, three feet in diameter and about four feet deep. The corpse was put down the hole, with its face to the east; and with it a little grain, some thatching grass, the snuff-box of the deceased, and the pot he had used for cooking. These necessary articles equipped the departed for his sojourn in the next world, where he was expected to sow a little corn and fix up a few huts against the arrival there of his surviving relatives. Then the grave was closed in with a round stone which fitted into the hole above the deceased's head, and on top of this the earth was rammed down. Everybody present threw a little dirt into the hole, first saying, "Rest in peace and trouble us not." After that the cattle of the deceased were made to pass over the grave, which was thereby made sacred to the family.

That finished the ceremony, except for the slaying of an ox and the purification of all who had handled the body or taken part in the obsequies. And the same occasion was taken to purify the soldiers of the blood they had shed in the fight with Vokwana, so that the spirits of the slain should not pursue them and trouble their sleep. In all of this Gogoza took a leading part, and spun out the ceremonies to such length that it was well on to the middle of the afternoon before the council could begin.

Into all the proceedings of the council it would be wearisome to go. But it was a great *pitso*. Napo stood up in the circle which was formed in front of the chief's

hut and addressed the people. He counselled them, now that the power of Vokwana was broken, to combine against any chief setting himself up as a tyrant in their midst. He urged them to break up their scattered kraals, to come over and join forces with Tindaba, and, upon a mutual agreement amongst themselves, to establish in place of a half-dozen five-milers, of no strength or consequence, one important chieftainship and people.

There was a long and animated discussion about this, which raged for more than four days. Everybody wanted to talk and did talk, since next to fighting and plunder talk was the thing that appealed most to these people. They would get up tribal confabulations on a small pretext and go on arguing and disputing for days on end, unless someone commenced arguing with a hatchet, whereupon there would be a general fight and a re-grouping of the disputants afterwards. This was the way new tribes were sometimes formed in those days, breaking into offshoots and establishing new kraals. Very little of any consequence could be done without an argument and a fight. In this case the fight had come first and the argument afterwards; and the upshot of it all was that the chiefs agreed and a new tribe was thus established.

Then Napo took it upon himself to give the tribe a name. He called it Matchla, "the People of the Brand," and the chief Tindaba he re-christened Letchla, "the Brand," because that tribe was formed and the chief appointed over it by reason of the burning of Vokwana's kraal. Henceforth *fire* was the *seboko*, or tribal emblem, of the people, and was sacred. If any man put out a fire without uttering the special invocation which Gogoza invented and patented on the spot, he would be ordered to undergo an annoying and expensive purification; and if he refused to be purified he would be turned out of the tribe, his property would be confiscated, and his soul would be damned in sixteen varieties by a convocation of wizards. Nobody forgot the invocation.

It was arranged, too, that the succession to the chieftainship should fall not on the house of Tindaba, whose eldest son was dead, but on that of the chief bringing

the biggest assets to the alliance; and so on, till each house had had a chance in some remote generation, if the tribe lasted long enough, to give a chief to the People of the Brand.

It was a grand idea, and fired the popular imagination; though Pempwa, who had only twenty-five head of cattle and about a dozen goats, and was therefore at the tail of the procession, restrained his enthusiasm when he reckoned up that it would be about two hundred years before *his* family took over the kingdom.

But the great stroke of genius, which showed Napo to be a statesman of the highest order, was the creation of a Council of Princes, to which all the small chiefs joining the alliance were to belong. They were to be called by a special title, were to be saluted in a special way, were to sit by themselves at tribal councils, and were to rank equally in every state matter, next only to Letchla himself. The man who had twenty-five cattle and a dozen goats felt that life had its compensations when he was called "prince." It gave them all a satisfying importance. They could swell around now, till the kraal seemed hardly big enough for them, oozing patronage and condescension at every pore. The pretence attached to honours of all sorts has been the best part of them at all periods of the world's history.

All these matters, though they took time and led to many protracted arguments, were arranged with such secrecy and dispatch that the surrounding great chiefs, some of whom might have raised objections, hardly knew what was afoot till everything was agreed on and the small villages began to concentrate on Letchla's kraal. And on the very day that the first village arrived there with its inhabitants, its huts and its live stock, all in one procession, the three travellers came before an assembly of the people and said they must be moving on. The news was received like a national disaster.

"O Dwarf," said the chief Letchla, acting as spokesman for the tribe, "we would that you stayed with us to captain our fighting men; and you, Dabazooki, to doctor us; and you, too, Bushman, who fought so well at the Place of Burning. Ye came here, the three of you, but half a moon since, finding us weak and sore

beset by a fierce enemy. Ye have delivered us and made us strong. Have what ye will in wives and herds, and stay."

"Nay, chief," said Napo. "All this have we done because it was so appointed. But we are sworn to a mission, we three, and that is appointed also, nor may we turn from it." He raised up his hand, after his fashion when speaking, and threw his head back proudly, looking straight into the sky. "I go, O chief and People of the Brand, to seek a Golden Glory that hath called me from a far land to follow it, as a wanderer at night followeth a star. I go to seek that glory in a strange land and amongst a strange people. I seek it by flood and field, by fire and sword, through bloodshed and hardship and perchance sickness, and in much wandering, and mayhap through Death itself. I know not how or when or where I find it, but go I must!"

Letchla shook his head doubtfully.

"Perchance thy Golden Glory lieth in war?" he said. "If so we may have enough and to spare of such glory, if thou wilt tarry here."

"Nay, chief, such glory as I seek moves on faster than my feet follow, and it is not to be found in warring with these tribes."

"Then there may be glory in much riches and many wives," said Letchla. "Stay and ye shall have women and cattle, the three of you, and be rich next only to the chief himself."

But Napo shook his head.

"We thank thee, chief; but it may not be, for we are called hence whither we hope that Golden Glory waits us. But this reward will we take from thee for what we have done: that if perchance we need help to wrest this Glory from any that would withhold it from us, we shall send word to the People of the Brand, and they shall remember in that day who gave them dominion over this land where now, O Letchla, mayest thou rule in peace!"

Then Meputu, newly created by Napo general of the fighting men, rose up and in a sad voice said:

"Since ye go, Dwarf, Giant, and Bushman, fare ye

well, and may this Golden Glory of which ye speak soon be yours. And when ye send for help from our people I myself will come to you, and with me all that fought under your leadership at the Place of Burning. We have said it!"

"We have said it!" repeated all present.

Napo turned and saluted, and the chief and all present saluted in return. Then the chief Letchla covered his face with a corner of his mat, as a sign that he could not look on the departure of his friends for the great sorrow of his heart at losing them; and silently the three travellers went away. They went loaded, too, with food and arms and brass rings and ornaments, many of them recovered from the smouldering ruins of Vokwana's huts, and others given by Letchla and his people in token of affection. Not till they had gone a mile did the three turn and look back.

"It was a great fight," said Keshwan, shaking the reed outfit on his shoulders. "There is something in this wizardry, Napo, if it can bring such meat for a man's spear!"

"Methinks," said Napo, reflectively, "wizardry or no wizardry, there will be more meat for our spears before this quest is ended. And I think we and the People of the Brand shall again fight side by side."

"Meat for the spear is a good thing for soldiers," said the Bushman, with a laugh. "For myself, what pleased me most in that adventure was the meat I had for my stomach. And if your wizardry can bring that in plenty, O Keshwan, I shall bow down to you as the greatest of wizards in this land."

They walked on a long way over the veld, and towards evening they came to a kraal and halted at it. One or two children were playing about stark naked. Clothes were scarce enough in that land for the grown-ups, and if you would picture this period of native simplicity, you must think of a people whose most elaborate garment, and generally the only one, was a sporan made of beads. The man who could sport a kaross had a right to boast, and did so, and was looked on with envious eyes by the persons who could only put reed girdles about their loins on ceremonial occasions. The

black barbarians of South Africa had not attained in those days to the wearing of store clothes, and not till a generation later was a pair of trousers seen on any of them. The first one that made its appearance in that part of the world was mistaken for a coat and was worn that way, being much admired for the length of its sleeves and the smallness of its back. A chief wore it on the great occasion of celebrating his sister's marriage to a nearby potentate. After the wedding feast the nearby potentate stole the coat and went off with it. He thought he could improve matters by cutting it into two pieces and wearing it on his legs. He did the right thing there; but stealing it was poor judgment, because a feud was set up on that account between him and his brother-in-law, which led to a great battle, in which the potentate was defeated and the trousers torn to rags. But all this happened in a later generation, when the Basutos had become a people with one name and were standing on the threshold of civilisation. Trousers and civilisation have always marched together.

Inside the kraal the three travellers found only a few old men and half a dozen women. They were pulling down the thatched huts, piling the thatch in bundles, and collecting the earthenware cooking-pots and other litter.

"We belong now to the People of the Brand," they said. "Our chief, Mololo, is over yonder at the kraal of Letchla. Our people have gone thither, and to-morrow we join them."

"How many fighting men were numbered amongst you?" asked Napo.

"An hundred and half a hundred."

"This war against Vokwana will make Letchla strong and the People of the Brand a great people," said Keshwan. "See," and he pointed across the veld, in the direction of a low, undulating rise some miles distant. All turned to look, and they saw there a long file of men, women, and children marching, the men with shield and assegai, the women with pots upon their heads.

"Those are the Botlho, the People of the Hare, that

go also to join Letchla," said an old woman. "They take to him over an hundred fighting men."

"Then there are the people of Bimbi, and of Noqutu, and of Makoloane, and some others," said Napo. "Soon Letchla will have over a thousand fighting men and large herds."

"We saw the Place of Burning and the whole sky was red," said the old woman.

"It was red with the blood of that accursed Vokwana," said one of the men.

"Ay," said Napo, reflectively; "and mayhap ere long this land will be red with the blood of another tyrant, and through that blood we and the People of the Brand may have to march together."

Only Keshwan and the Bushman guessed of whom he spoke, and no more was said. But for a long while Napo watched that trail of men and women passing across the veld in the evening sunlight, and seemed to be dreaming.

CHAPTER XVI

How the travellers fell in with a strange company; how a snake-bitten sufferer was cured marvellously; how the magic of Keshwan failed him at a crucial juncture; and how three rich men were changed to beggars in a moment.

THAT night the travellers slept in one of the almost dismantled huts in the kraal of Mololo, and fared sumptuously on the good things given them by Letchla.

"Even as I said, we shall journey henceforth on full stomachs," said Keshwan, gobbling hard. But as it happened, their good fortune was soon to end.

Next day they were up with the dawn and on their way once more. The Bushman, gorged almost to repletion (for it was the custom of his race to eat three times as much as they needed when they had the chance, against the time when they had nothing), would have lingered in the kraal, and wanted to sleep longer. But in the midst of his dreams, and just when his slumbers were sweetest, two of the old men pulled the hut down about his ears and he had to get out quickly.

"A pest on Letchla and the whole of his tribe and all ye that join it!" yelled Baroa, furiously. But there was no help for it. Not a single hut was left standing when the sun rose. Mololo's kraal was demolished, and its place knew it no more.

The travellers set forth down the dew-drenched slope of the hill into a green and pleasant valley, where the morning mists hung like a veil of gossamer. They were well armed and heavily laden with the good things given them by Letchla's people. The air was crisp, fresh, and invigorating; the earth was beautiful, the sky cloudless, the way easy; and Napo, swinging his bent legs and his

long arms as he walked in front, felt his step light and his heart buoyant for the future.

This was the very day to fare forth on a great adventure, to plan wonderful achievements, to dream golden dreams. Birds sang to them as they passed through the little wooded kloofs that ran down here and there into the valley; a stream went roaring and shouting over the wet, glistening boulders, plunged into the cool shade of overhanging trees, and swept with a glad song into the golden sunlight; the trees were dappled with light and shadow, and soft breezes stirred the grass with an alluring murmur. The Dwarf, full of the great quest after his illusive glory, let his imagination rise and soar, till it seemed that every turn of the valley might bring to light a fresh adventure and every green hill hide a new mystery.

The valley they were passing through was the greenest and goodliest they had yet seen. On either side was a fringe of trees following the line of the stream, from whose narrow and rocky bed came up a clamour of rushing water that sounded in their ears like music. Beyond the trees rose up gently swelling hills of a vivid green, save where the sun had yellowed the grass in great patches like fields of ripe corn. At the far end of the valley, where it broadened and ended, was a chain of flat-topped mountains, all blue and misty, with deep, cool ravines, in which the Bushman saw visions of buck and birds patiently waiting for him to snare them. All day they marched along through this lovely pleasaunce, halting once only for a bite of food and a draught of cold water from the stream.

When dusk was falling they came to a little hill and climbed it. Here they found evidence of recent habitation—a demolished fence, of which a few stumps were standing, and the circular marks on the ground where some fifteen or twenty huts had stood only a few days earlier. The ashes of recent fires were there, too, and the fragments of broken cooking-pots.

"Here Pempwa had his habitation," said the Dwarf. "His people were the first to come in and join Letchla."

"He is now a prince of that tribe," said Keshwan sententiously. "Bethink ye how great honour hath

befallen some of these bushrats that a while since cowered in their holes!"

"And we who brought them such honours must now fill the holes for them," said Baroa, dumping his load on the ground.

They sat down where they were and prepared food, and afterwards they spread out the sleeping-mats that Letchla had given them, and made themselves exceedingly comfortable. The night air was balmy; and in any case they were used to it and required little shelter. They slept the sleep of the tired and the just, and in the grey dawn awoke refreshed and ready to resume their journey.

They saw on looking out that they had reached the head of the valley, where the long, grassy slopes leading to the flat-topped mountains came down into it. There was a cattle-track running through the sun-browned grass in an easterly direction, and this they took. Doubtless in this direction Pempwa's cattle had been driven out to graze, and they might find it an easy way round the mountain. So they turned their backs on the site of Pempwa's kraal, and their faces to the east, and marched on just as the sun was gilding the whole expanse of the valley with a mellow radiance.

The ground was rising steadily, and for three hours they climbed up the slope of the hills, following the cattle-track. When they reached the top they looked back and saw the wide valley below them, and far off in the distance the contour of the hills that shut off Letchla's kraal from sight. But that was a good thirty miles behind them now.

"Letchla will be the greatest of all chiefs in these parts," said Keshwan, as they strode on. "And to think that my magic with live coals and the blood of fowls hath wrought all this!"

He swelled out his chest and began to enlarge on the subject. He told with great elaboration of detail just how the blood of a fowl, dropped with precision on a live coal, might favourably affect the fortunes of a man, provided of course the act was performed by a wizard of worth and experience, and provided also such wizard was first aware by the processes of high magic just what he had set out to do; it being a well-known rule

of wizardry, with which all genuine magicians were thoroughly acquainted, that only those wizards could achieve success in whom abode the gift of prophecy. That gift he well knew he possessed in a high degree; as witness the remarkable fact, to which all men could attest, that the moment he entered Tindaba's kraal it was made known to him by the magical properties of his mind that the chief's son lay dying of a fever, and that thereupon hinged the whole matter of the succession and of Vokwana's intention to go up against Tindaba. Wherefore——

"Peace, babbler!" exclaimed the Bushman. "All that you say was revealed by your witchcraft was made known first to me by the woman at the drift, and I told it to you!"

But to this Keshwan would not give assent, arguing that although Baroa had undoubtedly said certain things—this was admitted; not he nor any man could deny it, because it was the undoubted truth—yet the knowledge of these matters was privily possessed by himself, a fact which he communicated to no man, least of all to a wandering bushman of no more account in the land than a starved jackal, though of much the same appearance. Wherefore it ill became such low and unimportant persons to call in question the magical properties of his mind, acquired in youth through long converse with Kwokwa and other great men of magic, who taught him at first glance to read straightway the heart of a man, thereby revealing the innermost purposes of those that approached him even at a great distance——

"Wherefore by your renowned magic tell me," said Baroa, suddenly, "who these be that come towards us now, and why they drag between them one that seemeth to be tied by the legs."

Keshwan shaded his eyes, looked in the direction named, swallowed hard, and scratched his head.

"Methinks," said Napo, looking into the distance, too, "these be soldiers carrying a prisoner. Doubtless Keshwan can tell us who they are and whence they come, and whether they devise ill against us."

"Fool!" said Keshwan, looking again, "these be

not soldiers, but women, and the person tied by the legs is a man."

"Your eyes tell you that, not your magic," said Baroa, "for I, too, perceive now that the two on either side are women and the one in the centre is a man."

The three looked earnestly at this unaccustomed spectacle. The approaching party hobbled along with painful slowness, but gradually came nearer, till they reached a clump of trees immediately overlooking a small donga. Here they halted, and the two women released their burden. The man sank to the ground and lay at full length under the trees. Then one of the women made a signal to the three travellers to come quickly.

"Fetch out the flummery from your ratskin bags," said Napo, moving forward. "Mayhap here is a case of sickness befitting a great doctor."

Keshwan, whose medicine-making was of a most primitive order, sincerely hoped not. Seeing, however, that these were only old women, and not robbers, as might have been supposed from the lawless condition of the country, the travellers walked swiftly over the undulating ground, and were soon standing beside the prostrate invalid.

"He hath been bitten by a green mamba," said one of the women, and the invalid groaned.

"How long since?" asked Baroa.

"But just now as we saw you come over the hill yonder," said the other woman.

The victim of the mamba gave a most hideous groan.

"Kneel and examine," he said. "Mayhap in those bags, wizard, there is a simple that will cure me!"

Keshwan knelt down, and as he did so the invalid contracted his leg and gave a good kick. Then he began to tremble.

"He is possessed!" said one of the women. "Hold him, hold him! See, I will hold your spears! Quick!"

As the snake-bitten sufferer showed signs of shaking himself to pieces unless promptly attended to, the three travellers flung aside their arms, knelt down, and grabbed his limbs.

"Never have I seen one thus strangely affected by a

snake-bite," said Napo, panting. "You, Baroa, seize his arms while I hold his head still."

"Of a surety this is no snake's work—he hath a devil!" said Keshwan, receiving a kick in the pit of the stomach. He grabbed the sufferer by the heels and held on tight.

"And now what are we to do but watch him die?" asked Baroa, for each one had hold of some part of the sufferer's anatomy and dared not let go.

The next second was one of the most surprising in the lives of our three adventurers. Suddenly, without a syllable of warning, each was seized violently from behind, the snake-bitten victim sprang lightly to his feet with a loud laugh, kicking the Bushman over as he did so, and the two women disappeared in the donga with the shields, assegais, and spears of the Good Samaritans.

"Struggle and we slay!" said a voice behind the amazed trio. "We that have seized you starve for the want of food; and that which ye have, also these bangles and your other goods, we covet and shall take. Your lives we take not if ye surrender peaceably."

Keshwan, prone on the ground where he had fallen in the brief and unequal struggle, looked up and saw they were held captive by six stalwart ruffians, and for ought he knew there were more in the donga. Each of the men was armed, whereas their own arms were gone with the retreating women. Napo also looked round and perceived this fact and bowed to the inevitable. With a spear in his hand he would cheerfully defy the whole gang, and doubtless rout them. But seeing himself helpless, and knowing full well the ways of that robber-infested country, he gave in. Keshwan gave in, too; as did Baroa, cursing the old man that had kicked him. There was no help for it.

In less time than it takes to tell, they were robbed of every particle of food, and of the brass rings and ornaments and other gifts showered on them by the People of the Brand. From being rich, comfortable, and happy, they were changed to paupers in a moment. Such were the vicissitudes of the place and the period.

"And now, begone!" said the spokesman of the robber party. "Yonder in that direction ye may find

friends, for there is a kraal there a day's journey beyond the mountain, where food is in such abundance that no man eats it!"

The man and his companions laughed derisively, and the three travellers, departing sore and crestfallen, wondered why.

They walked on for a long way without speaking. Then the Bushman broke the silence.

"Better in this country to be robbers than wizards," he said. "Robbers can tell when those approach them who are worth waiting for."

"And wizards can tell nothing that is worth knowing at all," said Napo, harshly.

"Nevertheless," said Keshwan, after a glum silence, "wizardry brought us rewards in plenty from the People of the Brand."

"And knavery took the rewards from us," said Napo. "Wherefore wizardry of your sort hath failed of its first purpose."

"Notwithstanding which," said Keshwan, "methinks there may yet be a chance to retrieve our fortune by it. When we reach this kraal of which they spoke, where food is in such plenty that men will not eat it, we shall see."

"Meanwhile," persisted the Bushman, "we shall travel, as before, on empty stomachs."

"Which," said Keshwan, "is no new thing for a wandering bushrat to do."

They marched on silently once more. Presently Napo looked back, and far off on the brow of a low hill he saw black forms sitting round about in a semicircle.

"They make a feast of the spoil," he said. "Had we but weapons I would be for following after and slaying them to a man."

"And I with you," said Keshwan, scowling.

"And were I a wizard of great renown," said the Bushman, spitefully, "I would make a magic straightway that would congeal the food in their stomachs and bring them to death forthwith, weapons or no weapons."

"And being only a rat," said Keshwan, sternly, "you can do nothing but squeak."

"Peace!" said Napo. "The food is gone and the

weapons with it. Dogs cease fighting when the meat is finished."

Keshwan swallowed the hint with a bad grace, and all that afternoon he strode along moodily. He was feeling cheap and ordinary. As a wizard he might with moderate luck have attained to a high pinnacle of self-esteem. In fact, his first transaction in the business had raised him up a good way beyond his expectations. Gifts had been showered upon him. Gogoza, who was old enough to be his great-grandfather in roguery, had sat at his feet and humbly requested instruction in the great art of divination by fowl's blood. Women had "*kwowked*" with fearsome adoration as he passed; little children had run screaming when they saw him. And now here was this miserable Bushman, a mere skinful of bones and malice, openly taunting him, and grinning in such fashion as was almost beyond bearing and would assuredly bring about murder if persisted in.

He brooded upon the indignity of his position, till he became a martyr and loathed the unfeeling world. Then he began to talk. Gratitude there was none on the whole earth. Who had gained power and riches for the People of the Brand? Who had found their chief a cowering nonentity, threatened with extinction, had slain his oppressor, and had raised up the people to a position of great strength and affluence? Who had bestowed upon his travelling companions such riches in food, arms, and raiment as none had before ever dreamed of possessing? Who had contrived a splendid fight and achieved a grand victory? *He* had done it—by wizardry. Yet here were these two marching beside him speechless, without gratitude of any sort, and that baboon of a Bushman grinning from ear to ear because the devilry of two old women and a man (the same being clearly the tools of witchcraft) had overcome him temporarily by a trap, whereof no man, not even the wisest in the whole land, could possibly have had cognisance. Obviously it was the design of some great and powerful wizard, by enchantments known only to himself; wherefore it was no shame or humiliation for him, Keshwan, unsuspecting of evil, to go unprepared into such misadventure as had befallen; since it was well known and

clearly demonstrated by his past achievements that, had he pitted his wizardry against that of the old woman and the man, all would have been overthrown and discomfited. Yet here were these, who marched beside him, delighting in this grievous adversity. And that miserable Bushman—who, it was well known and widely attested, was the son of a dog and a consorter with devourers of carrion—that undersized rat which walked on two legs was, he repeated, grinning with a malignant persistency and devilish malice that no man could be expected to endure; least of all Keshwan, whose achievements in wizardry and war entitled him to receive not laughter but the lowest abasement from prowling creatures who were one part man and three parts monkey, and smelt like goats. Wherefore——

With this the Giant reached over in a fury and smote Baroa the Bushman a blow on the ear that froze the malignant grin on the face of that individual, and levelled him to the earth.

"That," said Keshwan, "settles my account with you, Bushman, for the time being," and he strode on, whistling and happy in a moment.

Baroa picked himself up with a curse.

"And my account with you, Giant, shall be settled at your next boasting of great wizardry, whereupon shall be told the true story of the two old women and the sick man."

CHAPTER XVII

Begins with the invasion of a land of mystery; tells why the inhabitants of that land were silent; shows our travellers in the presence of the Spotted Death; reveals the Dwarf and the Giant in a new light; and ends with a dissertation on savagery and civilisation.

WHEN evening fell the travellers found themselves skirting the eastern spur of the flat-topped mountains, round which a pathway worn by the feet of oxen wound in a rough spiral. They looked about them for the glimmer of kraal-fires in the distance, but nothing was to be seen anywhere.

"These tracks are old," said the Bushman, examining the hoof-marks. "No cattle have passed this way for many days. And those that came wandered hither towards us and were not driven by men. There is no sign of a man's foot in all these markings."

"That is indeed strange," said Napo. "This land hereabouts seems to be empty. I mind me now that we have seen no hut or kraal anywhere since before we encountered those filthy robbers."

"Yet the land has been but recently inhabited, for I saw cornfields on a hillside," said Keshwan.

"I, too, saw them," put in Baroa. "But no man or beast did I see anywhere."

They came, as he spoke, to a donga which intersected the pathway, and here, as the night was approaching, they sought out a place for sleep and hiding. The warm earth was a good enough bed for them, the low-lying branches of a bush a good enough coverlet, and sleep came soon and soundly. It was past daybreak when they awoke. Napo arose, stretched his gigantic arms and looked around.

Beyond the confines of the donga stretched the veld

for a distance of several miles. It was bordered by a line of low hills, near the centre of which a kopje jutted up in rugged and forbidding outline. Great as the distance was, Napo's keen eyes discerned upon its summit the fretted outline of huts. Here possibly was the kraal of which the robbers spoke. Moreover, on looking again, Napo saw nearer at hand, but some miles distant across the veld, a ridge upon which stood two huts, tall and of blackened reeds. These, doubtless, were the abode of drovers. Yet round and about them no cattle were to be seen anywhere.

They started forth towards these huts to seek food and information. There was a strange silence over everything—a silence which seemed to them almost uncanny. Always from where the habitations of man were seen in that country there would come at early morning the sound of men calling to each other across the distances, of cattle lowing, of children shouting as they drove the herds out to the pasturage. No such sounds were to be heard here.

There was a corn-patch on the sloping hillside before the drovers' huts were reached. But nobody could be seen in or about it. Birds rose up in hundreds from the corn as the travellers passed through it, yet there were no boys and girls in hiding to frighten these winged thieves from the stolen feast.

"The land is bewitched," said the Bushman. "Some great wizard like Keshwan hath passed through it casting a spell of sleep on the people. See," and he pointed to the two huts.

Through the morning mists that circled about them they rose up gaunt and ghostly, like two old crones with tall head-dresses. Their doors, facing upon the cornfields, were wide open and yawning black like toothless mouths. The travellers ascended the rise gingerly.

"Inside there be dead men or sleepers," said Keshwan, and he looked into the first hut. It was empty. Then he looked into the second. It was empty also. There were mats and cooking-pots upon the floor, a little food in the corner, and in one of the huts an assegai and some bead leglets.

"They seem to have been left in flight," said Napo.

"Perhaps at the kraal yonder there has been a beer drink, and all sleep after it," suggested Baroa.

"In which circumstance," said Keshwan, crawling into the hut on all fours, "travellers may well make free of such hospitality as absent hosts can offer."

With that he annexed the food, took the assegai, and affixed the leglets below his own knees. He came out again and divided up the food, which consisted of a baked pumpkin partially consumed, and a saucer of roasted mealies. When they had eaten all there was they set out in the direction of the kraal on the kopje. It was an hour before they reached it. The sun was high in the heavens by this time. Yet not a living soul did they meet on the way, nor was man or woman visible about the kraal. There were dogs there, though. They heard them barking as they drew near, and one was howling—the long-drawn, dismal howl of grief or fear.

The kraal was surrounded by a low fence of thorns. The rough gateway of thatched reeds was down, and they passed in unchallenged. The moment they stepped across the threshold the barking of the dogs ceased. In the sudden and almost awful silence the Bushman shivered and drew back.

"It is a place of death!" he said, whimpering. "I smell death in the air."

He drew back from the gateway, still shivering with dread, and nothing would induce him to go a step farther.

Napo and the Giant walked on between the silent and deserted huts. A few fowls were wandering about aimlessly, and they saw the starved dog whose howls had broken upon their hearing as they came up the hill. It crawled to their feet whining and fearful, and Keshwan kicked it. He did this because it is in the nature of man to kick a dog when it gets near enough. And it is in the nature of dogs either to rush snarling away or to turn over on their backs and ask to be kicked some more. It depends on the breed of the dog whether it does the latter and on the breed of the man whether it gets kicked again. But this dog did neither of these

things. It took the kick dogfully and yelped from sheer habit; then it got down on its stomach and crawled convulsively over the dust-laden ground towards one of the huts. Most of the huts were open and empty, as Napo saw by a glance at them. But this one, when they reached it, they saw was closed and the door latched on the inside.

"Open!" cried Napo, battering with his fists.

But there was no answer. The dog crawled to the doorway and whined again piteously.

"Methinks there came a sound," said Keshwan, listening.

"Open!" cried Napo again, but there was silence.

Then Keshwan, with a thrust of his foot, stove in the door, and the dog leaped in wildly through the aperture. Somewhere in the dark and evil-smelling interior it found something and began to scratch and whimper beside it. Napo heard a groan now, and a woman's faint voice murmured:

"Enter, and come quickly, or I die!"

He crept into the dark hut, and as his eyes became accustomed to the light he saw what was lying there. On the ground in one corner lay a form covered with a mat—a still form, which lay on its back rigid and motionless, with its hands crossed stiffly upon its breast, as he could tell from the bulge of the mat that covered it. Opposite, but scarcely two feet away, lay a young woman with an infant on her breast, and the starved dog crouching at her shoulder. The child lay still and corpse-like, and the woman breathed heavily.

"Give me to drink," she said faintly. "Fire burns me and I perish!"

Near the pole of the hut, Napo, groping about, discovered a gourd which contained some curdled milk. This he gave to the woman, who was so weak that she could scarcely swallow.

"Drink or no drink, she dies," said Keshwan, peering into the hut.

"Ay, and that soon," said the woman, faintly. "See, Strangers, this my child lies on my bosom dead. Yonder my husband lies dead also. Why then should I live?"

The woman raised her arm as she spoke, and the mat with which she was covered fell from about her breasts. Napo, looking more closely, saw what was the matter with her, and drew back with a start. It was smallpox!

"I die shortly," she said, with a pitiful gesture. "Go, Strangers, and leave me to my death. This place and all in it are accursed!"

She looked up at the Dwarf with glazing eyes, and her frame trembled.

"I pray thee give me the babe to hold closer," she said. "Then we may go down together into death and darkness."

For a moment the two men held back—Napo with the gourd in his hand, the dog threshing his feet impatiently with its tail, and Keshwan on his knees at the hut door, peering in. They knew something of this terrible disease, the past ravages of which had swept off thousands from the land, and they dreaded it. Had they fled from the hut at the first sign of it, and left the woman to die alone, they would have been no more than prudent, according to their lights; for in that land and among these wandering people, the obligations of a common humanity were light. Keshwan, indeed, raised himself into a sitting posture, and made ready to go. But the Dwarf, pausing for an instant with the same intent, changed his mind. He set down the gourd, took the dead child in his huge hands, and laid it high upon its mother's bosom, where her poor, tortured eyes could look on it.

Keshwan, when he saw that, cast his fears behind, and crept into the hut, too.

"Woman," he said, "it were better to die in the sunlight than in this hole. Come," and he took one end of the mat on which she lay, motioning to the Dwarf to take the other.

"For this I give thanks, that ye have shown such mercy," said the woman, feebly. "Now shall I look on the face of this my babe before the darkness covers us."

Very gently they bore the dying woman and the dead child into the light of day. The woman gave a cry of pain as the light smote her eyes. Then she closed them.

"Many in these huts lie dead," she said, between gasps. "The Spots smote us because of a witchcraft, so that men, women, and children died like flies. Some of the people have fled with the Spotted Death on them, and will carry it about the country. Others took the cattle and fled yonder, hoping to escape it. This is the kraal of Zobonga. He lies dead in the great hut yonder, and one of his wives with him. He came aforetime from the kraal of Tetwiza, two days' journey yonder towards the east. I am Masisi, wife of Kobane, whom ye saw dead in the hut. All in this place were bewitched and it is henceforth accursed."

She spoke at times so low that only Keshwan could hear her words, for his ear was nearest to her lips.

"How may we journey quickest through this land of the Spotted Death?" asked the Giant, who had a mind to get out of the neighbourhood with the least possible delay.

Her voice came so feebly in reply that he had his ear down to her mouth before he could catch a word of it.

"Cross over the hill yonder, only a day and night, and ye shall come to Tetwiza's kraal."

She lay still for a moment, but when she spoke again it was seen that she had drifted into delirium. She began talking to the dead baby, chiding it one moment, kissing its poor, scarred face the next, now weeping, now laughing. The Giant and the Dwarf looked on, silent and helpless. Napo crawled back into the accursed hut and fetched out the gourd of milk, and with his own hands gave the dying woman drink. Not even when her festered fingers clutched his arm, and a thrill of horror shivered through him, did he draw back.

"Give me to drink, give me to drink!" she moaned; and he knelt by her, letting her drink her fill feverishly. When she had finished Keshwan drew up the mat about her body and settled the dead child in her arms.

"They spoke truly, Dwarf," he said, "when they told us there was a kraal where food was in such plenty that none ate it. Look," and he pointed to one of the

huts of which the door was open. In the dim interior they saw corn in heaps, also potatoes and pumpkins.

"No wonder those robbers left the place untouched," said Napo. "Keshwan, the woman dies!"

It was true enough. She was very near her end. She clasped the poor, lifeless infant closely. Napo put the gourd to her lips, but she drank nothing.

"Leave me not here for the jackals and vultures," she managed to gasp out. "Lay me to sleep beside the body of Kobane."

Those were her last words.

Keshwan took hold of the mat again, and silently the two men dragged their dreadful burden into the death-laden darkness of the hut. They laid the body side by side with the dead man, covering them both, and the child with them, under the same mat. The dog, that had crept out when they bore the woman into the sunlight, crept back after them, and stretched itself across the feet of the corpses. When Napo would have dragged it away it turned, snarling and furious, and bit him. So they left it there, and came out, closing the door after them.

"Come!" said Napo, "there is neither food nor drink for us in this accursed place. Perchance even now we are touched with the Spotted Death!"

They walked swiftly between the deserted huts, passed through the opening in the reed fence, and found the Bushman cowering on the ground outside.

"It is true as you said, there is death there," began Keshwan, remembering Baroa's words. He stopped suddenly, for there at the Bushman's feet lay the dead body of a hideous and deformed old woman, whose wrinkled face stared up into the sunlight with open jaws and eyes wide with terror. There was foam on her lips, and from between her shrivelled breasts blood was still flowing.

"I killed her," said the Bushman, with as much concern as though the corpse was that of a kraal dog. "She came from the hut yonder raving as though mad. She shouted that all were dead and that she had killed them by a spell of witchcraft, which may have been a lie. But when she rushed at me with this assegai I

a command came to me yesterday by such means as you ridicule and hold cheaply, which, nevertheless, I must obey."

"He speaks of the spirit-voice," said Baroa.

"It came up out of the grave," said Keshwan, solemnly.

"Telling you whither we should journey?" asked the Dwarf in amazement.

"Describing the way, instructing me to practise magic in the kraal of Tetwiza, and promising that great honour and reward await us. Now hath any heard of this Tetwiza, that we may put the spirit's counsel to the test?"

"This land being strange to me," said Napo, "you might name five hundred kraals of which I have not heard."

"And your magic being of such renowned quality," said Baroa, "you doubtless can tell us whether the spirit spoke truth and there is any such kraal or person."

"Nay," said Keshwan, with dignity and firmness, "my magic being called in question by fellows of low habit and imperfect understanding, it were not meet that I should expose it to derision further. But this I say, that I go to the east a day's journey, as I was commanded. Come ye with me and we shall see whether or not this spirit, perceiving the magical properties of my mind, gave counsel to me from the grave itself, and so imbued me with its own powers of wizardry. Come, Monkey and Baboon!"

Napo, rather vexed and puzzled, scratched his head, looked at the Bushman, who was scratching his, and decided to give in. A day's journey in one direction or the other was not worth falling out about, and it were better for the three to travel together than to part company.

"But hark you, Giant, if there be no such kraal, and any more robbers," he said darkly, "Baboon and Monkey shall dig the magic out of your bowels with these assegais and send you to join that spirit!"

Keshwan laughed at this pleasantry, shook his ratskin bags and the reed head-piece with joyful vigour, and marched on ahead, very well pleased with himself. He

was in high feather in a moment, and brimming over with the glad confidence of a man that takes long odds on a certainty. He said nothing, however, to spoil the approaching climax. He endured in silence the gibes of the Bushman and the occasional sarcasms of the Dwarf. If it pleased them to throw doubt on his magic and to disbelieve in his affinity with the departed spirits, so let it be. All the deeper would be their shame and humiliation, and all the greater his triumph. Indeed, before long, he was actually persuading himself that he really was a wizard of some consequence, which was not a hard thing for a man to do in a land where every impostor was received at his own valuation. He worked himself up to a feeling of such serene confidence in his great attainments, that he even pardoned his companions for their unbelieving scepticism. For was it not universally admitted by all persons skilled in magic that those inferior in intelligence to themselves could not be expected to appraise their great worth or appreciate their wisdom? Wherefore he forgave, freely and without reservation, pitying the ignorance of these poor scoffers, upon whom, though, alas! they knew it not, must fall presently by reason of their unbelief a most grievous burden of shame, contumely and abject humiliation. Wherefore——

"This Tetwiza, whose kraal we visit," said Napo, breaking in upon these reflections, "is he a great chief with women and herds?"

"That we shall see presently," replied Keshwan, discreetly.

"Then if the spirit omitted to advise you on that point," said Napo, "methinks we had best go in hiding in that donga till these be past that drive cattle before them and are followed by women carrying pots."

Keshwan looked up startled, and beheld in the distance a slowly moving file of beasts and people coming across the plain. There were over a hundred head of cattle in the van, driven by a dozen or more men. Behind came a file of women, as could be seen even at that distance by the pots they carried on their heads. The party was chanting a song of some sort, of which

snatches were wafted on the breeze. The women kept time with the clapping of hands.

"Ye that are afraid of young women and cows," said Keshwan, "abide here while I go and see."

Napo and the Bushman laughed long and loud.

"Not of young women and cows, O Giant," said the Bushman, "but of old women and sick men."

"Of such we be in great terror," said Napo, wiping his eyes; "which is no shame to us, since not even the most renowned wizard can tell them from murderers and thieves."

They laughed again, chaffingly, and the Bushman said:

"Go then, and speak with them, and if they meditate harm against us, blast them with your magic, turning the women into cows and the cows into women."

"And the men I shall turn into goats and jackals," said Keshwan. "Then there shall be company for you in plenty for the rest of the journey."

They watched him stroll across the veld towards the advancing party. Presently they heard the long-drawn howl with which the natives accost each other at great distances. Keshwan was hailing the strangers. Every word of the dialogue that ensued could be heard distinctly. The voice of a native is trained to shouting across the kloofs and krantzes, and it carries distances which to a European seem marvellous. A group separating after a dance will carry on a conversation with ease up to a mile of distance, and sometimes beyond it. The mouth of a native is a megaphone and his voice is a ship's syren.

"I am Dabazooki, of the People of the Zulu!" yelled the Giant, untruthfully. "Who are ye that come this way?"

The hand-clapping and the singing ceased.

"We are of the People of Setlu!" came the answer. "Why does Dabazooki of the Zulu journey in this country?"

"I am a doctor and a man of magic!" shouted the Giant. "Why journey ye with men, women, and cattle?"

"We go with the bridegroom, Makani, son of Setlu,

to the bridal feast!" was the answer. "Who be these ye have left on the hillside watching us?"

"These be my companions, the Dwarf and the Bushman!" yelled Keshwan. "To whose kraal do ye journey for the bridal?"

"To the kraal of Tetwiza, half a day's journey! Whither journey ye and those with thee?"

Baroa and the Dwarf started and looked at each other.

"It was of this very person he said the spirit spoke to him," said the Bushman, awestruck.

"We, too, journey to the kraal of Tetwiza!" shouted the Giant. "Is the chief at his kraal making ready for the wedding?"

"Tetwiza is at his kraal! What is thy business with Tetwiza?"

So it went on, each answer being followed by another question, in the native way. Two people approaching from a mile apart would tell each other the whole of their family histories in this manner, and occasionally someone else who was listening a mile off in another direction would weigh in with appropriate observations. There was very little that was considered private and confidential by these people. If a man was married or had a son, or stole a cow, or had murdered his wife's mother, everyone would shout the details of the affair to everybody else. It would be a matter for gossip over a radius of twenty miles before sundown. If the news was really important it travelled farther than that and even quicker, so that white men, coming in contact with the natives, marvelled at the rapidity with which news was spread amongst them. Such astonishing feats have been performed by swift runners and leather lungs that some people have put them down to telepathy, but it was not so. Before the world had written languages every man was a newspaper, and of course that newspaper circulated everywhere and had as many editions as there were men. The women, of course, took a hand at spreading the news, too; and they have never given up doing so, but are just as active at it now as when the latest scandal had to be yelled from the hilltops instead of the housetops.

But Keshwan did not give away his business with Tetwiza, chiefly because he had not made up his mind what it was. He parried that question with another.

"Will there be a welcome at the wedding for three strangers if we come?"

To which the voice of Makani the bridegroom was heard to make answer:

"Since ye shall drink Tetwiza's beer and not mine, ye are welcome!"

So it came about that the three travellers presently found themselves of a wedding party, with prospects of unlimited feasting and a dance afterwards. But Napo the Dwarf showed small enthusiasm about the matter. Privately he said to Keshwan, as they strode along with the rabble: "I like not to eat up my time with bridals and feastings. Something tells me, Giant, that it would be well for us to be getting forth upon our journey."

"Whither do we journey?" asked Keshwan, nonchalantly.

The Dwarf knitted his brow and looked vexed.

"Whither Fate leads," he said, curtly. "Mayhap to great glory, mayhap to death."

"Then let death wait," said Keshwan. "And as for glory, there is enough of that just now in a pot of beer to please my liking. Besides, did not the spirit tell me we shall wax fat at the kraal of Tetwiza with this new magic?" He tapped the blow-pipe and the warm-water bowl, and rattled his skin bags triumphantly. "Did I not say we should find this kraal of Tetwiza's by journeying as the spirit of the wizard commanded? There, so the spirit said, we shall be received with great honour, and, because of my magic, riches shall be heaped upon us. So the spirit told me most clearly; and said, further, that after this land of pestilence wherethrough we have journeyed we should have plenty and wax comfortably fat."

"Methinks we shall wax fat for worms if we depend overmuch on your wizardry," said Napo. "Better to get some food from these people and pass on out of their country."

"What ails?" asked the Giant, with a puzzled look.

"Why haste always on this aimless quest when we may take time and enjoyment by the way?"

"If ye tire of the quest," persisted Napo, "abide ye with the people of Tetwiza and blow bubbles till your cheeks burst. As for me, something calls me to be journeying on."

"Nay," said Keshwan, "I tire of no quest, Dwarf, that promises adventure, and the strength of my arm may be an aid to you yet. Hearken now. Let us tarry with these people for the space of but seven days; then shall we go forward and wait no more by the way, if so you wish."

Even to this proposition the Dwarf found it hard to assent; but he was overruled. The Bushman, when appealed to, rubbed his stomach and sided with the Giant; and as for the Dwarf himself, he felt there was truth in what Keshwan said, and that the arm of that swashbuckling monster might be of service before he found his Golden Glory, and himself a friend he should not despise in a strange country. So he consented, albeit reluctantly, little guessing what issues hung upon that decision.

CHAPTER XIX

Narrates the story of a tribal feud common to the country; deals with chiefs, ambassadors, bridegrooms and high personages; makes introductions with great ceremony; and ends in an atmosphere of suspicion.

WHILE the party moved forward talk was general, and the story of Makani's betrothal to the daughter of Tetwiza, whom he was to carry home as his bride, was imparted to the strangers.

The nuptials, it appeared, had acquired the significance of a national event of far-reaching importance—at least it reached out to a distance of some forty miles, and would affect the destinies of four tribes.

The people of Setlu, it was stated, had been for a long time at enmity with Tetwiza over one of those cattle transactions which gave these people, in a small way, the right to rank with the most high-toned Christian nations. Tetwiza was the possessor of some fine herds, which he had "acquired" bit by bit from his weaker neighbours. The process of acquisition was a simple one. When a nearby tribe seemed to him to possess rather more of the world's goods than was its rightful share, Tetwiza would go with a company of soldiers, take half, and return to his own kraal with the spoil. Occasionally he created a few corpses at the place of call, when it was necessary by this means to establish the good old axiom that might is right and the weakest must go to the wall. But it must be admitted that nobody was ever killed by Tetwiza unless he had the effrontery to declare himself best entitled to his own belongings. In other words, he had to ask very pointedly to be killed; and, when he did that in the manner indicated, Tetwiza always obliged him. But if a man had the sound

wisdom to recognise the law of the land, namely that his property was his only till such time as a stronger demanded it of him, Tetwiza invariably respected that man's good sense and high reasoning powers, and forthwith took the property, or the best part of it, promising he would come round some day for the remainder. He was a man of his word, too. He always did come round: he would sooner have cut off his right hand than break a promise of that sort and deceive these confiding people.

For a good long time Tetwiza roamed about the countryside with his company of soldiers, redeeming his old promises, till at last he had acquired herds that became the envy of a powerful contemporary. This was the chief Setlu, about forty miles away, whose tribe was smaller but his stronghold so wellnigh impregnable that Tetwiza had never risked crossing spears with him. Setlu was first in the neighbourhood, having been there for some years when Tetwiza came with his following, and would have provoked a fight with the interloper, had not the latter outnumbered him in fighting men by almost three to one. There was, accordingly, an armed neutrality between the two tribes. On one occasion, however, the limit was overstepped, whence arose the events shortly to be witnessed.

It appeared, from what the travellers were told, that Setlu, on one of his expeditions among the small tribes subordinate to himself, was amazed to find that Tetwiza had visited and robbed them of their cattle. Setlu thereupon registered a vow before the people that he would punish Tetwiza and force him to make reparation. He won over all the kraals with this promise, and soon after returned to his own stronghold with the whole of the inhabitants in his train.

The effect of this *coup* was that whereas Tetwiza had enriched himself with the stolen cattle, Setlu found his tribe, and especially his soldiery, so considerably augmented that there was soon some hope of getting the cattle, too. When due preparation had been made, therefore, he arranged for a daylight attack to be delivered on Tetwiza's herds. To put heart for the enterprise into his soldiers he agreed that one cow and its increase should become the property of every ten men;

and he drew the most glowing picture that was ever drawn outside an estate agent's catalogue of the marvellous fecundity of Tetwiza's cows. It was calculated by Setlu, and confirmed by Katego, the Chancellor of his Exchequer, that in the third generation of his people each man would possess individually a herd of such enormous proportions that there might be some difficulty in finding room for it in the country. The things he said had the same effect on the simple savages that a gold-mining prospectus has to-day on the wise whites. The whole tribe was forthwith in a fury to start out to fetch those cows in and set up business.

But the expedition, though a success to the promotor, resembled the gold-mining prospectuses in that the shareholders found it a long way below expectations. Forty of Setlu's men were killed in the foray, and at least half of Tetwiza's cattle escaped capture. This fact reminded Setlu that his offer of a cow to every ten men was contingent on the whole lot being taken. In this he was confirmed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who got his share of the loot in consequence. However, even the partial failure of the expedition left Setlu a rich man and wellnigh beggared Tetwiza, which was something to be thankful for.

Tetwiza, noting the increased strength of Setlu's tribe, forbore to make reprisals. Notwithstanding that his soldiers numbered over five thousand as against about two thousand of Setlu's, the situation of Setlu's stronghold was such that, until all suspicion of attack could be lulled to rest, he did not dare to try conclusions. So, being a cunning fox, he played a waiting game; and part of his game was to pretend, after a decent interval, that he had not only forgiven Setlu but, being advanced in years, was desirous of securing peace for his people. An ambassador was sent to the kraal of Setlu with this message and two beasts. Setlu, misled by the friendliness of Tetwiza's words, fell into the trap. He and the Chancellor of the Exchequer got gloriously drunk, and the ambassador got drunk with them. There was a three days' carousal before the answer went back to Tetwiza. It was, of course, ambiguous; because no diplomatist ever says straight out what he means, when he can travel

round and about a subject, deceive and lie, and set up a colourable pretence of meaning something altogether different. So for a few weeks a grand palaver was in progress between the two chiefs, during which time Setlu was counting Tetwiza's cattle, and Tetwiza was counting Setlu's soldiers.

At last, after interminable talk, they came to the point. The chiefs met, and there was a formal reconciliation. A white ox was sacrificed, this being the proper ceremony for such an occasion; and, according to the custom of the country, each chief thrust his hand into the stomach of the ox and smeared the other with the entrails. (They had some pleasing ceremonies in those days.) Afterwards, all who had witnessed the reconciliation dined off the ox, and the affair wound up with a grand beer-drink at each kraal, with all the abominations appropriate to a whole week of praise and thanksgiving. Then Tetwiza, the aged and peace-loving, prepared his next move.

The alliance, he said, must be cemented by something more binding than an exchange of presents and a few drunken orgies. These might answer well enough for people who had no high social standing or noble motives. But on persons of their calibre it was incumbent to go further. He desired to give peace, happiness, and prosperity to his people ere he passed hence full of years (and beer); and nothing would delight him more than that, after the grave closed over him, they should swear fealty to Setlu, and live thereafter in the shadow of his wing. Setlu flapped his wing, metaphorically, when he heard this, and resolved to gather all of Setlu's people and the whole of his herds under it at the earliest opportunity. It seemed, continued Tetwiza, that the best way to bring all this about was that he should give his daughter in marriage to Setlu's son, and that eventually the male issue of this union should rule over the allied tribes.

So entirely delighted was Setlu with the proposition that he forgot himself and nearly sent an acceptance right away; but he countermanded it in time to keep the negotiations going in approved fashion for two months and a dozen beer-drinks. At the end of that time the marriage was arranged, and now Setlu's son was on the

way to fetch his bride from Tetwiza's kraal. A retinue came with him of male and female attendants to the number of a hundred, and they brought gifts of beer. They brought also a wedding present of unparalleled magnitude, but doubtful generosity; for of the hundred and twenty head of cattle sent by Setlu to the bride's father, it was calculated to a certainty that, when Tetwiza died, Setlu would possess every one of them again.

It was sundown when the bridal party reached the kraal, and the fires were already lit. That they were expected was evident from the concourse of men, women, and children which lined the approaches. As the arrivals swaggered along up the pathway to the kraal-gate, somebody set up a chant, and the crowd took up the refrain.

"*To the son of Setlu, to Makani, we give greeting! Yi-yi-yi-yi!*

"*Makani comes with a message of great honour from his father! E-he, e-hee, e-hee!*

"*He comes to bestow on Tetwiza the friendship of a great warrior, to give the people of Tetwiza increase of many cattle! Owa-owa-owa!*

"*Tetwiza is great, but Setlu shall be as a father to his children! Wow-wow, wow-wow!*"

And so on, with endless repetitions, and long-drawn yells, and much lavishing of praise on the visitors. The women and children clapped their hands in unison with the chant, and the men stamped their feet thunderously. The bridegroom, being a stickler for etiquette, as became a chief's son, responded to these overtures by calling on the world in loud tones to bear witness that Tetwiza was a roaring cyclone of death, misery, and destruction, his daughter a perfect marvel of beauty, and his people the bloodiest and most awe-inspiring on the earth. This declaration the retinue signed, sealed, and delivered by elaborate *hi-yi's* and *wow's*; and the ceremony of introduction was over. But before it was ended some of Tetwiza's drovers took the precaution of conducting the wedding present to the kraals.

Napo and the Giant passed through the village

entrance with the rabble. But by some mischance, which afterwards proved of good fortune, the Bushman became separated from them in the crush. Huts had been assigned to the wedding party and, as the public introduction to the chief was not to be till some hours later, food had been prepared for them. As Napo and the Giant passed along towards the hut which was to be theirs, two men stepped out of its shadows and instantly stepped back again. In the dusk they were visible for a moment only. But in that fraction of time Napo's keen eyes searched their faces, and he started. There was something in their expressions so entirely inappropriate to the rejoicings of a wedding feast that he was moved to hang back for a second before entering. The soldier who was showing the way to the hut seemed to be as quick of perception as the Dwarf. Perhaps he needed to be.

"What ails you?" he asked, with a sudden narrowing of the brows. "Here is thy hut. Rest, and in an hour ye shall be summoned into Tetwiza's presence."

"When begins the feasting?" asked the Giant, in surprise.

"The feasting begins with the slaying of a beast at midnight," said the soldier. "Mayhap," he said, "more than one shall be slain," and he laughed to himself.

"Why, then, if the feasting is at midnight, shall we, who are strangers to Tetwiza, be summoned thus early to the chief's presence?" asked Napo.

"Of that let the chief tell thee," said the soldier, curtly. "In the hut there is food in plenty and good beer. Tetwiza treats well his guests, whether they be friends or—or strangers," and with that he turned and strode swiftly away.

CHAPTER XX

Tells how the Dwarf upset the beer, and why; shows the Bushman eavesdropping behind a hut; reveals the presence of an important personage; and takes Napo a step farther on his quest for Golden Glory.

As they passed into the hut the Dwarf cast a searching glance round and about him. The noise of laughter and merry-making could be heard: women shouting out coarse jests to the new arrivals, and the men answering them in such fashion as would have made an ox blush if it had understood; the moving of people to and fro in the hum of anticipation and excitement; quarrelling between two men somewhere over a fire where food was cooking; and a voice chanting the praises of the chief and extolling his liberality in the matter of beer. Over and about the kraal hung the thin blue smoke of the fires, ascending in little spirals, and the air was pungent with the smell of burning. There was nothing in anything he saw to cause Napo misgiving—except just one thing. For, as he turned towards the hut door, he caught in the tail of his eye a glimpse of two other men, sullen and forbidding as the couple he had first noticed. They, too, slunk away into the shadows of a hut.

"There is a guard set over every guest to-night!" thought Napo, as they crawled in.

"Beer!" exclaimed Keshwan, who went in first. There was a kalabash full of it, also a pot of food, and a kaross to lie on. The Giant stretched out his hand for the kalabash.

"Drink not!" said Napo in a hoarse whisper, and, seizing the kalabash, he emptied its contents on the earthen floor.

Keshwan, his arm stretched out, sat as if petrified with amazement.

"Fool!" said the Dwarf, sternly. "I tell thee there is that afoot this night which needs men, not drunken fools to deal with!" He crept to the Giant's side and whispered, so that no eavesdropper might overhear. "Armed men are everywhere on guard! The drink that is prepared for us to-night is blood; and the bride of this wedding is named Death!"

The Giant stared at him in astonishment for a moment, looked at the overturned kalabash, and then stared back at the Dwarf.

"Methinks," said Napo, taking a pinch of snuff, "the counsel of that spirit will shortly be found to have brought us to such pass as will need your best wizardry to get us out of it. I have seen evil boding in this kraal."

"Evil in plenty," said Keshwan, with a growl, "when clumsy fools spill good beer to waste. What matters how drunk a man is at a wedding feast?" he went on, grumbling. "Since men, women, and children shall lie like logs before morning, as well begin now."

"Some who lie like logs shall be dead branches of the tree!" said Napo.

"You see red, Dwarf," persisted Keshwan, in anything but a good humour. "These soldiers you think watch us secretly are but dressed for the dancing. They tell me there are five thousand soldiers at Tetwiza's kraal."

"And there would need to be ten thousand at Setlu's," said Napo, "ere drunkards could contend with sober men."

"And my thirst is such to-night," snapped out Keshwan, "that I had rather be ten thousand drunkards than one dry fool!"

Napo was about to retort to him that he could be the equal of ten thousand fools any day, wet or dry, if he set his mind to it and practised enough wizardry, when suddenly the hut door was opened and a form like that of a monkey crept in swiftly and noiselessly and shut the door again. It was Baroa the Bushman, and he was panting.

"Speak not above a whisper!" he exclaimed in a hoarse undertone. "Those are at hand who have long ears. Listen, Dwarf and Giant!"

In a few short sentences he told how he was separated from his companions in the crush at the kraal entrance; how he slipped out from the rabble presently and inquired the whereabouts of the Dwarf and Giant; how he was misdirected, coming suddenly on the *lekhotla*, or open space, before the chief's hut, where soldiers were on guard; how he slipped behind the hut, where there was a tree, and crept under its branches; and how, as he was on the point of leaving the spot, he overheard voices in the chief's hut, and listened.

"Napo, I tell thee," he said, solemnly, "and I tell thee, Giant, there is a blood feud in this kraal that must be wiped out to-night! Many shall perish!"

He paused for a moment. Keshwan's eyes gleamed out of the darkness.

"Speak, little Monkey!" he said, thickly.

"I crouched with my ear to the wall of the hut," went on Baroa. "Two that spake inside I heard call each other by name. One was Tetwiza himself. The other who spake as though his tongue clave to his mouth, he spake so slowly, was named Maponda."

"*Maponda!*"

Napo the Dwarf almost sprang to his feet in the shock of mingled amazement and thanksgiving that swept through him.

"*Maponda! Maponda!*" he repeated, uttering the name again and again. "Maponda, who dwelt in the same kraal with Sekonyela, and fought by his side, and I thought was slain! Maponda alive and in this kraal! Now of a surety there is hope for my quest of Golden Glory!"

He rose up swiftly and spread out his great arms till his fingers touched the sides of the hut.

"Maponda, that speaks heavily because his tongue cannot move—it is he who was with Sekonyela at the slaying of our people: it is he who fled with Sekonyela when he stole the Golden Glory that I seek! I thought he was dead these long years since, but he lives and I have found him! See!" and he shook the framework

of the hut with his outstretched hands. "I am strong, I am fierce, I am ready! Tell on, little Monkey!"

He crouched down again, his face alight and his eyes flaming. Keshwan the Giant forgot all about the spilled beer. Here was an adventure worth coming far to seek!

"They were speaking in the hut of this wedding and of Setlu's people, and of the herds that were stolen in the foray, just as these people told us," said the Bushman. "All that they said I did not understand, because much had gone before. But this I heard. 'When is the killing?' asked Maponda, and Tetwiza answered: 'At midnight one shall be killed. Then the messengers shall be sent forth.' 'And to-morrow?' 'To-morrow we shall wait. If by sundown they are not here and the cattle with them, then all shall be killed, every one.' 'And when all are killed, Tetwiza?' 'Then shall Setlu be forced to attack us in the open, else shall I lead forth my soldiers against him, and put him and his people to the spear, man, woman, and child, and destroy his kraal. Not a living thing shall be left, and the land shall know him and his people no more!' When he had said this, Tetwiza seemed to rise up, and words were spoken that I could not hear. But this man Maponda, who speaks slowly in a thin voice——"

"In a thin voice," repeated Napo. "He was named the Owl by his own people because his laugh is like an owl's hoot."

"And 'Maponda the Owl,' Tetwiza called him," said Baroa. "This man said: 'And these, of whom word is brought that they overtook Setlu's people on the way hither, one I think, from what is said of his shape, I knew by repute in years past as an ill fellow. He is called Dwarf, O chief, and better for all that he be slain before he works mischief than that he abide in this kraal.'"

Napo gave a fierce chuckle. "Better by far for Maponda, and for Sekonyela, too!" he said darkly.

"To this," continued Baroa, "Tetwiza answered: 'The three shall be made prisoners. They are watched now. As for the slaying of the Dwarf, let it wait. First shall be put to the test the wizardries of that Zulu who is named Dabazooki!'"

Keshwan gave an uncomfortable start.

"Work here for thy bubble-blower, doubtless," said Napo, cheerfully. "What more, little Monkey?"

"To this it seemed that Maponda the Owl gave assent. There was a confusion of words somewhat, whence there presently came forth the voice of Tetwiza, saying: 'His wizardries may be helpful to us against Setlu. If not he shall die, as you say, and the Dwarf with him!' When that was said someone left the hut and I crept away unseen, and have sought you out and told all."

"You have done well, Bushman, to be our eyes and ears in this matter," said Napo. "Listen, now, Keshwan and Baroa, for I have thought quickly. In this place we are in danger of our lives, and from Maponda we need expect no mercy. For some purpose, which I guess, he has become a councillor in this kraal, and is doubtless using this fool Tetwiza for his own ends and Sekonyela's. Of that we may know more in due season. Now you, Keshwan, shall make a magic before the chief and shall reveal to him these things which Baroa has told us. With good fortune he will be deceived as Letchla was, though to another purpose, which I will explain shortly. But first a warning must be sent to the chief Setlu, that this treachery is planned against him."

"Truly, Dwarf," said Keshwan, admiringly, "yours is the brain for the swift reasoning of great matters. But how shall Setlu be warned before the messengers reach him?"

"Baroa shall take the warning!"

"To-night?" exclaimed the Bushman, incredulously.

"To-night!" said the Dwarf; "and it shall be done this way. You shall seem to have drunk empty our whole kalabash of beer, and shall go forth from the hut bawling. While you are making pretence of drunkenness, get near to the kraal-gate and await there an opportunity to pass out unnoticed. Then run like a monkey or a hare!"

"To run is easy," said the Bushman, with a grunt, "but to know whither and how far is another matter."

"Leave it to me and you shall learn whither," said

Napo. "And now let me tell the plan I have made for turning the spears of Tetwiza and Maponda against themselves."

For the space of about twenty minutes the Dwarf talked and the others listened. Then the Bushman said with a laugh:

"This spirit that promised us honours and rewards at Tetwiza's kraal was a liar of high standing, Giant, for we are prisoners and I hear the gaoler coming!"

There was a step outside, and, as he spoke, someone threw the hut door open. It was the soldier who had led them there.

"Come!" he said, gruffly. "The chief awaits you!"

Napo rose up, as if to follow him, then paused and said casually:

"Where are Setlu's people?"

"They rest in the huts, making ready for the dance," said the soldier.

"I and the Giant here would have speech with one of them," said Napo.

"And why so?" asked the soldier, sharply.

"It is a matter of great urgency between the two of us," persisted Napo.

The soldier looked from one to the other with evident suspicion. Then it crossed his mind to humour them, since some information might come of doing so.

"If it is a matter of urgency, tell me," he said, "that I may judge whether to give you speech with one of them or not."

"It is this," said Napo, "and on the answer of him that tells us hangs a gift for him—from me, if he speaks for Keshwan's contention, from the Giant if he speaks for mine. So the gift is sure in any case. We two have disputed here almost to the exchange of blows, as to where the kraal of Setlu is and how far from Tetwiza's. I say it is yonder towards the east a full day's hard travelling; he says it is more westerly, and less than half a day."

"Then, if it comes to a dispute over so small a matter, and the gift holds good, I can answer that by my own mouth," said the soldier, falling into the trap. "Him that you call Giant is nearest to the truth. For if you

take the track below the cattle-enclosure and follow it for one hour, then turn sharply up the hill where the stream is, and go straight thereafter, you may reach Setlu's kraal easily in three hours."

"That was not the way we came," said Napo. "We crossed over no hill."

"Nay, because the bridal party came by the easier road that skirts the valley yonder, and places Setlu's kraal five hours distant. But this way of which I speak is short, though rough. It is a path more fit for goats than men, and those that travel betwixt the two kraals travel the longer road."

Baroa, listening with all his ears from the corner where he had crept, gave a gurgle.

"He is drunk," said Napo. "Before we could touch the beer he had drained the whole kalabash."

The Bushman struggled into a sitting posture, then rose unsteadily on his legs and lurched forward.

"Beer!" he grunted. "Give me beer!"

"Peace, fool!" said Napo, angrily, but the soldier laughed.

"Let him drink," he said, and took up the kalabash. "Here, Monkey, take this and fill it, for all shall be drunk at this wedding!"

He caught the stumbling Bushman by the arm, and swung him out of the hut, kalabash and all. Baroa fell to the earth, and began howling.

"Peace!" exclaimed Napo again, and sprang out after him. "This servant of ours, soldier, is made sober in one way only: thus——" and he bent down and began to belabour the prostrate form. Baroa kept on howling, and very nearly overdid the part, considering the Dwarf's blows missed him every time, and hit the earth. And between the blows a sharp whispered soliloquy went on:

"Dog of a Bushman—(*run as you never ran before*)—would you be for ever drinking and drinking—(*and tell Setlu*)—and bringing us to shame because of you—(*to be ready with every man*)—so that almost nightly you receive blows—(*but to keep them hidden*)—which you well merit—(*to capture the messengers*)—and shall receive in plenty—(*and send his soldiers mixed up*)—you shall drink no more to-night—(*with the cattle for Tet-*

wiza)—but shall sleep in the open—(*and he will find us waiting for him*)—like the jackal you are—(*at that place by the stream*)—and the son of a jackal—(*and half-way on the longer road*)—and now get away, you drunken fool!" (*thud, thud!*)

"Enough!" said the soldier, sharply. "Let the fool lie there or get drunk, as he pleases. Tetwiza grows impatient."

Then Napo and the Giant left Baroa still howling.

"As for your gift, soldier," said the Giant, as they moved away, "you shall have that on the morrow without fail!"

He looked back as they turned down a narrow lane between the huts, to see Baroa pick himself up and stagger drunkenly away.

CHAPTER XXI

In which two old enemies meet, but say nothing; Keshwan sees a Black Ox drowning and performs a feat of wizardry; Napo gains command of an army and gives his first order; and preparations are made for pulling the Black Ox out of the stream.

NAPO and the Giant were conducted straight to the chief's hut. They found themselves passing through a ring of soldiers who guarded its approaches. In one corner of the *lekhotla* was a contrivance which at once attracted the Dwarf's attention—even before he turned towards the waiting group opposite. It consisted of a thin bamboo pole about ten feet long, bent almost double and attached by ox-hide thongs to a stake driven in the ground. Napo knew the use of that flexible bamboo. This was the work of Maponda, without doubt, for that instrument was a peculiarity of the interior tribes from which he came. Its purpose was shortly to be demonstrated, as Napo guessed.

A fire was burning near the hut door, and on a kaross beside it Tetwiza sat with his councillors. They looked up as the strangers approached, and the first face on which the Dwarf's gaze fell was Maponda's.

It was a thick-set, evil face, coal-black, with lips so red they might have been painted with a bushman's pigments. The brow was beetling and repellent, the head flat in front and bullet-shaped behind, the ears pulled out at an extreme angle, so that the lobes were almost horizontal. In figure, Maponda was thin, lithe, and strong, his attitude haughty, his demeanour crafty and cruel. He looked the sort of man whom it is better to have for a friend than an enemy.

The two recognised each other on the instant. Keshwan, looking too, was sure of that. But neither gave the least sign.

Napo and the Giant advanced and saluted the chief.

"We are here, O Tetwiza," said the Dwarf.

The chief raised himself on the kaross and exposed a rotund figure and a flabby face. He, too, had a crafty and cruel look; but it was not so clever as Maponda's. Keshwan, who knew neither of them, was sharp enough to guess that the treachery which was being planned against Setlu—and possibly against themselves—was of Maponda's devising, and not Tetwiza's. But the general repulsiveness of the chief's face and the insolence of his bearing showed that he was a fitting instrument for any devilry from which a profit could be made.

"I have sent for you, O Dwarf and O Giant," began Tetwiza. Then he looked round about him sharply and asked: "Where is the little Bushman monkey?"

"He is drunk, O chief," said Napo, "and sore from a beating I gave him."

"Then till he is sober again with thee only will I deal," said Tetwiza. "I have sent for you because it is reported to me that you, Dabazooki, are a wizard of the Zulu. I have heard much of that country and its sorceries."

"Ay, O chief," said Keshwan, boldly. "And its sorceries are of such nature that some of us wizards can look into a man's mind and reveal what is doing there!"

"In which case," said Tetwiza, with a crafty smile, "their sorceries might save their own skins on some occasions. Come, wizard, if you are possessed also of that power, tell me what lies in my mind in saying that!"

"This lies there," said Keshwan, promptly, "that if my wizardries fail of their purpose in helping thee to a certain course, I, too, shall have occasion for saving my skin."

Tetwiza started. So did Maponda. There was a slight stir amongst the group round the kaross. Keshwan saw that his first words had created a good effect. Not to spoil it in any way, he threw up his right hand towards the heavens and said solemnly:

"O chief, I have seen rivers of blood, and rivers of tears, and a Black Ox drowning in them!"

This was in the true style of wizardry. It always created a solemn impression to drag an animal into these things and to give it a distinctive colour, or if it was an elephant to say it had one tusk, if a buffalo that it had a broken horn, and so on. By and by something would happen which would enable a smart wizard to connect this colour or that peculiarity with some event or person, and claim that he was inspired.

"This man must be a great wizard," said somebody in the group.

Tetwiza turned a shade uncomfortable, for more than likely the Black Ox was meant for him. Maponda, too, shifted about uneasily, fixing Keshwan with his sharp eyes. Then he lifted up his thin falsetto and spoke, haltingly. The Dwarf, who had not heard that voice for many a long day, listened with a grim smile.

"O chief," said Maponda, "since this Dabazooki of the Zulu sees so easily into the minds of men, let him tell us what purpose we have to-night!"

There was a murmur of approval from the councillors.

"Give me a spear," said the Giant.

A soldier gave him one.

"Another."

Another was brought. This sort of mummery delighted Keshwan. It could give importance to the simplest imposture, and put up a wizard's reputation visibly by some degrees. He would have preferred trying the bubble-blower, or the fowl's blood and coals, as being more spectacular and therefore better suited to an occasion like this. But these things took time, and time was precious that night. The Dwarf, in fact, had hurriedly insisted that any tomfoolery which was necessary must be got through with dispatch if their plans for the support of Setlu were not to miscarry. So Keshwan called for a third spear, and then advanced to the group of councillors. He held up his right hand and exclaimed:

"Let all be silent!"

An old man who snuffled at the nose was cuffed over

the ear, and there was silence. The soldiers standing round about leaned forward and watched fascinated.

"Let Tetwiza the chief and Maponda the councillor sit forward nearly a spear's length apart."

Tetwiza and the red-lipped Maponda shuffled into the front of the circle, looking rather shaky. The inhabitants of that country liked to see wizardry practised on other people.

"Now," said Keshwan, "move not by a hair till I tell you."

With that he placed two of the spears on the heads of Maponda and the chief, a blade resting on each head. The third spear he placed across the others, at right angles, the blade resting on his own head. Then he closed his eyes and communed with himself for three minutes. He wished he could employ the time in communing with Napo, but that was impossible. So he set his wits going on his own account, and this was the result.

Amidst a profound silence he removed the spears, planted them in the ground—where they stayed, for their owners thought they were bewitched and would not touch them—and said loudly but solemnly:

"From the brains of Tetwiza and Maponda this message is brought to the brain of Dabazooki.

"The killing shall be at midnight. One shall be killed, then the messengers shall be sent forth.

"To-morrow we shall wait. If by sundown they are not here and the cattle with them, then all shall be killed, every one.

"When all are killed, Setlu shall be forced out to fight us in the open, else shall the soldiers of Tetwiza go up against him, and put him and his people to the spear, man, woman, and child, and destroy his kraal. Not a living thing shall be left, and the land shall know him and his people no more!"

A gasp of amazement burst from the lips of Tetwiza and his councillors. They had seen something in the way of soothsaying, but no wizardry that was in the same kraal with this!

"He has uttered thy very words, O chief!" exclaimed an aged head-man.

"Such marvel of wizardry has not been seen in this land!" ejaculated another.

"And all this he devised without recourse to bones, bladders, or incantations!" cried a third.

"Truly," said Tetwiza, more awestruck than anybody, "you have read that which was in our hearts, O wizard. It seems to me that with such wisdom you should give counsel now how this thing shall be brought about which is planned. Since you know all, tell us the end!"

"I have said that I saw rivers of blood and tears and a Black Ox drowning in them. There is one here that has power to save the Ox," said Keshwan, pointing to the Dwarf.

"On one condition, O chief," said Napo; "and this is that, if I plan to save the Ox from drowning, my counsel shall be followed to the letter, and my command shall be divided with no man—not even with thee!"

At this a discussion began to arise. Some of the councillors, awed by the supernatural powers of Dabazooki, were for resigning everything into Napo's hands. Others were for giving the command to the chief himself, with which body sided Maponda, whose influence was evidently considerable in that kraal. Strange to say—though possibly from motives of prudence—Tetwiza himself put forward the suggestion that Maponda should lead the expedition, a matter which the two had probably discussed in private, to judge from the glances they exchanged. The significance of Maponda's look, at all events, was not lost on the Dwarf. He saw that he needed to take a decisive line.

"Choose ye, and choose swiftly," he said, with apparent indifference. "I seek no glory in fighting against Setlu, and no reward in fighting for Tetwiza. Rather would I be going upon my journey with this wizard here."

"Nevertheless," said Keshwan, and all listened now with deep respect, "if the Black Ox is not helped from the water he will drown."

There was a long and uncomfortable silence. It was broken by the oldest of the councillors.

"Help has been sent to the Black Ox by the spirit of his fathers," he said solemnly.

Somebody else said "*Wow!*"—which, being interpreted, meant, "If we don't take the assistance so providentially offered us by the spirits, we had better look out!"

Tetwiza was clearly of the same opinion, but he hesitated for some moments. He was secretly afraid of losing a good chance with the spirits on the one hand, and of offending Maponda on the other. The Dwarf and Maponda watched him silently, and the councillors whispered among themselves. Presently Tetwiza thought he had conceived a brilliant idea.

"Let the army be divided into two halves," he said. "The command of one half we will give to Maponda, and of one half to him that is called Dwarf."

"And let that be known to thy soldiers," said Napo, with a grunt, "and I foretell that before the battle is ended the two halves of Tetwiza's army will be fighting among themselves. Thus shall Setlu come into his own!"

"He speaks truth," said one of the councillors. "The command is not divisible. Let lots be drawn, if thou willest, or let it go by the vote of the councillors."

"But let this be well understood," said Napo, "that if the command goes in whole or in part to another, neither shall I aid thee by my generalship nor Dabazocki by his wisdom."

"As to that matter," said Keshwan, "it was revealed to me in a vision"; whereat the same person as before said "*Wow!*" this apparently being the extent of his vocabulary.

Fully interpreted, it meant, "If you take my advice you will not be such fools as to ignore this ultimatum."

The chief gave an exclamation of perplexity.

"Since the drawing of lots would waste time, the mind of this man being made up," he said to the councillors, "decide ye the question whether Maponda or the Dwarf leads, and decide quickly, for there is much to do to-night."

"And as for me, I weary of this talk," said Maponda, breaking silence for the second time. "Give the com-

mand to this wanderer and his wizard, for I refuse it!"

"Thus, then, it is settled," said the chief, quickly, and evidently much relieved. "Napo the Dwarf shall command the regiments!"

"From this moment, O chief?" asked Napo.

"From this moment!"

"And the command that I utter to thy soldiers is a law till the battle is fought?"

"It is a law."

"Ye have heard what the chief says?" asked Napo of the councillors.

"We have heard, O Dwarf!"

"And ye?" turning to the soldiers that stood near by.

"We have heard, O Dwarf!"

"Then," said Napo, suddenly, "this is my first command. Seize Maponda and place him prisoner in his own hut!"

There was a moment's pause. The soldiers looked at Napo, Maponda looked at the soldiers, and Tetwiza looked at the councillors. Here was an amazing turn of events!

Keshwan, too, looked at the councillors, and in a flash he saw by the expressions on at least three faces that the order was received with joy. Maponda evidently had his enemies; and it was one of them who, seeing the indecision of the soldiers and of Tetwiza himself at this unexpected development, clinched the matter. Rising up as if the discussion was at an end, he said:

"The word of Tetwiza is the word of Tetwiza!"

Not a very original observation. It meant that when Tetwiza had given his promise there was no going back on it for anybody; which was far from being the case. However, as the aforementioned *wów-er* once again said "*Wow!*" (meaning: "It is a fact which everybody knows"), and as the soldiers took a step forward, Tetwiza, feeling that in some manner his reputation was at stake, said:

"It is finished. Take him!"

Maponda turned his coal-black visage towards the Dwarf. His red mouth looked like a streak of blood.

"Thus do we meet in this land, Dwarf," he said,

almost beneath his breath. "After this matter with Setlu we shall stand equal. That shall be my day!"

He uttered no other word as he was led off to his hut.

"See that no harm comes to him," said Napo to the soldiers. "On the morrow he shall be restored to freedom—if he wills. And on the morrow I shall justify to all present this command I have given. And now, O chief, time is short and I would speak with the captains of thy regiments. Summon them if they are not here."

"These are my captains," said Tetwiza, and two men rose up from among the councillors and came forward.

"I am named Ratlali the Striker," said one.

"And I am named Sigwa the Swift," said the other.

They were both fine young men, proud and of a courageous bearing. These, thought Napo, would be better friends than foes; and he registered a mental determination that if possible they should be saved from the slaughter. He would have use some day for strong men and good fighters, and these seemed to be of that breed.

Then Napo, without wasting further words, laid down his plan of campaign, and it was briefly this.

The messengers were to leave for the kraal of Setlu at such time as would bring them there at daybreak. They were to deliver this message: That if the cattle demanded by Tetwiza were not brought by them to Tetwiza's kraal by sundown, all the hostages, including the chief's son, would be slain. If the cattle were delivered all should go free. But no word was to be said of Tetwiza's intention to go up in any case with an army against Setlu.

When the messengers had gone, Sigwa was to follow with three regiments, and wait on the road till he had speech with the messengers as they returned. After this he was to go straight to the kraal of Setlu, arriving after dark, and invest it. He was to strike no blow till Napo came with the rest of the army.

Ratlali was to take the remaining three regiments to that part of the road where the shorter but steeper path turned off across the hill towards Setlu's kraal. There they were to wait till in time the messengers came along

the road and gave word that Sigwa and his regiments had gone to Setlu's kraal by the longer road. Then they were to advance by the steeper path, coming upon Setlu from one direction while Sigwa approached from the other. Here they would lie, each within striking distance, till, having heard report of the messengers, Napo joined them with a few details, whereupon the attack would be delivered simultaneously from two sides of Setlu's kraal.

"Thus, O chief," said Napo, turning towards Tetwiza, "if my command is followed, shall the Black Ox be saved from the drowning!"

A buzz of conversation arose, and it was evident the councillors regarded the plan as both feasible and clever. But, had they known it, none regarded it more so than Dabazooki the wizard. Indeed, when, an hour or two later, Napo elaborated the details for his private benefit, Keshwan's opinion of the generalship of the Dwarf went up by many degrees. The regiments of Tetwiza, numbering six, and consisting each of about eight hundred men, were, as already shown, to be split up into two commands, and so disposed that at no point could they possibly rejoin to defend Tetwiza. The first three regiments under Sigwa were to be surprised and attacked by Setlu's soldiers in the guise of the cattle-drovers, and here Keshwan resolved to be; for that fight promised to be a sharp one. The remaining three regiments, under Ratlali, were to be surprised and attacked by the main body of Setlu's men, sent post-haste along the short path over the hill. This body would be reinforced by the survivors from the first battle, and the two combined would then take Tetwiza's kraal.

So the forces were to be disposed, for Napo learned from Tetwiza that Setlu's men numbered only about two thousand. Allowing for heavy losses in the first fight on the road, he calculated that the advantage would be slightly on Setlu's side in the second fight against Ratlali's regiments.

Moreover, the details of the scheme, bold enough as it was itself, were of a daring which showed the resourcefulness of Napo. The messengers to Setlu were to number two hundred, were to go unarmed, as drovers

for the cattle, not as soldiers, so that no suspicions would be aroused, and were to be drawn from the fifth and sixth regiments. As the warning sent by Baroa would prepare Setlu for dealing with these men, they would be out of the fight, while the three regiments of Ratlali would therefore number only a few more than two thousand between them. This was, of course, a carefully contrived detail ensuring that the soldiers of Setlu, exhausted by fighting, should have not the greatest but the least opposition towards the end of the battle. And to crown all, the disposition of the regiments was to be such that not a blow need be struck at Tetwiza's kraal; though, as it chanced, the valour of the two captains upset this calculation somewhat. And, as a last but important detail, matters were so arranged that Maponda could be taken alive in his own hut.

"It is a good plan, and there will be a great fight!" exclaimed Keshwan, smacking his lips. "I tell you, Dwarf, this wizardry of mine is the worth of ten spears to a fighting man!"

"Then of your wizardry tell me," said Napo, knitting his brows, "how I am to carry word to Setlu where these regiments await him, one on the road and the other by the stream, and must be attacked there. For this is a matter on which success hangs."

The Giant dropped his jaw and began thinking, and the two sat where they were in the hut, silent for a few minutes.

"Hark!" said Keshwan, presently. "Women are summoning the marriage party to the presence of the chief! Soon blood shall begin to flow!"

He rose up and they crept from the hut.

"Leave that matter to me," whispered Keshwan over his shoulder. "The messengers shall deliver the warning to Setlu themselves!"

CHAPTER XXII

How Baroa the Bushman acted a part; how he refused to dance, but ran very well; how the warning was brought to Setlu in the nick of time; how the Wolf was the first to hear it; and how the messengers appeared at Setlu's kraal.

BAROA the Bushman picked himself up where Napo left him and reeled away shouting. He had been drunk so often in reality that he made a tolerably good imitation of it; good enough, anyway, to deceive the soldiers. He lurched up against one of them to test the realism of the performance. The man said "Beast!" and kicked him three yards away. So that proved it.

He crawled into the shadow of a hut and staggered out of it towards the kraal-gate. Men and women were moving about in this direction, and as Baroa suddenly appeared in a patch of light thrown by one of the fires, a woman raised her voice in a piercing scream.

"A devil is in the kraal!" she yelled, and fell over backwards.

There was a rush of feet, and Baroa found himself surrounded by a dozen people. Somebody raised a clump of wood and made to hit him across the head with it. Baroa dodged with surprising agility for a drunken man.

"'Tis no devil, 'tis a monkey!" cried a man, catching him by the arms. "Bring beer and let us make sport! Dance, dance, little Monkey!"—and the man gave Baroa a spin which sent him round like a top.

The Bushman danced as well as a drunken man could be expected to dance, and everybody roared. Children swarmed out of the huts to enjoy the fun. Presently some of the women, three-parts drunk themselves, for the beer had begun to flow early, began to dance, too.

Baroa noticed, however, that the men were sober. No doubt Tetwiza had put a ban on beer for the soldiery till the night's doings and the day's fight were over.

Somebody brought beer in a kalabash, and it was all the Bushman could do to get his lips past the opening and let it spill on the ground. Self-denial was not high in those days, and temperance was dictated by one thing only, namely want of opportunity for getting drunk. But fortunately for him, others were as thirsty as he, and the kalabash soon disappeared and became a returned empty.

The dance grew fast and uproarious. Everybody joined in, even the men. Others arrived and joined in, too; and presently the open space before the hut was packed with dancers and spectators. Baroa wondered how he could get out of the place. More beer went round, and even some of the children drank it, and got drunk in no time. Then they danced, too, waggling their naked bodies, stamping their podgy legs, and roaring out the popular indecencies of the kraal, till the women laughed as if their sides would split.

A Kafir dance had not then, and it has not now, any more grace or artistry than the caperings of baboons. Travellers, in their descriptive articles about the black races of Africa, have tried sometimes to exalt the native dances into a rude and primitive expression of the poetry of motion. They are rude enough—there is no question about that!—but they are not graceful, and the more women take part in them the ruder and more hideous they become. And, as for the music to which the natives dance, if the author reproduced it in these pages he would be summarily prosecuted, if not hung! There is really little sense of rhythm, and no idea of music in the composition of a Kafir. The thrum of a jews' harp will satisfy his craving for hours at a stretch, and will supply all the tune which he is able to recognise. From a piece of twine strung over the top of a condensed milk-tin he can saw out harmonies that ravish him. But in his savage state jews' harps and milk-tin banjos are horrors unknown to him. He whacks a tom-tom made of sheep-skin drawn tight over a piece of hollow wood, or blows tunelessly into a perforated reed.

He gets one note from each of these instruments, and those two notes embrace the whole range of harmony at his concerts.

As musicians are numerous, and concerts of frequent occurrence, among savage people, it is not surprising that murder is regarded by them as a simple commonplace.

While the dance was going on, Baroa the Bushman pretended to be getting drunker and drunker. But all the while he was wondering how he should ever get out of the place. The moments were flying by, and he had before him a race against death and very little time in which to run it. Several times he tried to slip through the crowd, but he was dragged back. But at last deliverance came in an unexpected way.

"Let the Monkey dance with Metela!" screamed one of the women, and a shout went up for Metela.

There was a scuffle in the crowd, and an aged and withered hag was pushed forward. She was as hideous a bag of bones as Baroa had ever set eyes on. So bent was she with age and infirmities of all sorts, one of which was a good-sized hump, that when she was thrust, screaming and protesting, into the circle, she seemed if anything smaller than the Bushman himself. They made a pair the like of which had never been seen at Tetwiza's kraal, and everybody laughed till the tears ran. Baroa saw in it all salvation for Napo's plans.

The old hag, propelled from behind, came tottering and mumbling into the ring. When she perceived the Bushman awaiting her, she saluted him by spitting in his face. Baroa spat in hers. Such, reader, were the manners of the time. Then the hag aimed a blow at the Bushman with her skinny fist, missed him, and toppled over, and the roar of laughter which followed shook the ground.

The crowd closed in. Somebody picked up the prostrate Metela and a yell went up for the dance to begin. Baroa, pretending to be drunk, shouted:

"I will not dance with any woman of this kraal! All are old and ugly!"

"Dance, dance!" shouted the insulted women. They broke into the ring and began pushing him this

way and that. One of them in the excitement smacked him in the face, and Baroa kicked her as hard as ever he could. This raised a yell from the woman. To keep the fun going, somebody threw the empty kalabash at Baroa's head. He dodged it and it hit the old hag, Metela, full in the face. Metela, thinking Baroa had thrown it, sprang at him like a cat and clawed his face with her long nails. Baroa clawed Metela with his. Others threw themselves into the fray. In two minutes the dance was forgotten, and there was a free fight.

This was Baroa's opportunity, and he took it. He lashed out left and right with his fists. He planted a smart blow on the stomach of a withered old man with woolly whiskers. The old man turned on him with a snarl, grabbed him by the neck, and slung him into the outskirts of the crowd.

"Fling the Monkey into the fields!" cried the shrill voice of a woman.

Fifty hands scratched and clawed to fulfil the command. Baroa felt himself lifted and carried bodily to the kraal-gate. It consisted of a barrier of interlaced boughs five feet high, and the formality of lowering the gate was dispensed with. Baroa found himself sailing through the air, and the next moment, amid a yell of laughter, he was on his back in the middle of a bush.

But he was not there long. A bushman is a tough morsel of humanity, and neither the rough handling in the *mêlée* nor the fall to earth had more than shaken him. With a bound he was up again; up and fleeing as if for his life down the steep hill into the darkness.

For hour on hour he ran, following the directions given by the soldier. His sharp eyes, used as he was to travelling by night, had no difficulty in picking up the cattle-track, till he reached the stream where the soldier had said the way to Setlu's kraal turned up the hill. Up the hill he sped, almost without stopping. On its crest he found a half-obliterated pathway made by human feet. Evidently the goat-herds traversed this spot, and doubtless travellers between the two kraals made it a short cut.

He kept on as straight as he could for the uneven nature of the ground. He ran steadily, and at great

speed, leaping over boulders, crashing through the undergrowth, bounding across gaping dongas, his small head erect, his arms swinging loose at his sides, his chest straight and rigid as a soldier's on parade. Indeed, his body scarcely moved from the perpendicular; the whole force of his movements was in the legs. Thus he had run scorces of times, flying from the retribution of avengers who sought his blood as some inadequate compensation for a stolen goat or an act of pilfering at a kraal-gate. By daylight, in open country, a bushman could run eighty miles in a day, and think nothing of it; and when it came to telling about it afterwards, he would call it a hundred and fifty, and think nothing of that.

It was wearing towards midnight when Baroa saw the fires of one of Setlu's cattle outposts twinkling on a hillside. He skirted the edge of the hill and ascended cautiously. Midnight visitors in those days were sometimes greeted with a spear-thrust, and were dead and buried before dawn. Consequently, if their intentions were honourable, they generally announced themselves from a little distance, and were not too forward about coming nearer without an invitation. Baroa crept up to within fifty yards of the smouldering fire, by the light of which he saw three soldiers crouching. He made a funnel of his hands and shouted:

"I am Baroa the Bushman, and I give you greeting!"

The soldiers sprang up, and Baroa, knowing there was no time to waste, came forward.

"Take me to the chief, Setlu," he said. "I bring news that he must hear now!"

Sweat stood out on his body in beads, and they saw that he was panting. The soldiers looked at each other in doubt, for Setlu was sleeping. Then one of them, perceiving that the Bushman was in earnest, said to the other two:

"Take him. I will stay here," and he yawned sleepily. "If there is anything of foolery in this jackal's barking, Katego will take the yelp out of him!"

The two men, grumbling as they went, started up the hill with Baroa between them, towards the dark mass of huts and thorn-fences that betokened the presence

of Setlu's stronghold. They passed through several narrow gaps in a circle of rough stone walls which had been built on the slope of the hill for the better protection of the kraal. At each entrance soldiers stood on guard and spoke to them as they passed in. Evidently Setlu was a man who took no chances.

As they came to the main gateway the silence of the sleeping kraal was broken by the baying of a dog. Another dog answered. A third broke into the duet, and that interlude woke up all the other dogs. Such a yelping and barking and snarling and growling could hardly have been excelled by a menagerie of hyenas.

It is a peculiarity of every Kafir kraal that it swarms with dogs of every size, shape, degree, and pedigree; and all dirty. Moreover, a Kafir dog that was not two parts starved to death, one part kicked to death, and the fourth part left to die from unnatural causes, would be a rarity worth acquiring for a museum. The native in his savage state has no sense of his duty towards dumb creation, except such of it as represents wealth to him; and dogs, unless of the hunting breed, are not wealth. But they are good things to kick and throw pots at and chase about when they hunt up some scrap of food for their famished stomachs. And so the native tolerates them and takes over all of their fleas they cannot conveniently carry!

Most of the dogs at Setlu's kraal were too tired or too emaciated to do more than bark. They lay about in the shadows of the huts and just barked. Some of them did not even lift their heads to do it. They kept their heads down on their forepaws, and the bark undulated through their long grey bodies as if they were swallowing backwards, and came out with a rip and a snarl. The soldiers took no notice of them, unless they were near enough to be kicked, and most of the dogs saw to that.

The kraal was asleep. A native can sleep through a fusillade of dog-barks and yelpings which would raise up the dead and would bring them along with brickbats in another country, but will be wide awake instantly at the hooting of an owl. The one thing he regards as the most commonplace of nature's voices,

and he gets as used to it as a man here does to the roaring of railway trains that pass a few yards from his front door. But the other sound has in it the note of a signal and a warning.

One of the soldiers stopped before a hut door, and gave a hoot, twice repeated quickly. A second later the door was opened, and the face of an elderly man peered out. A whiff of the hut came with it—a blast of concentrated smells and hot air that would have caught a white man in the chest and laid him up for a fortnight. It passed by the visitors harmlessly.

"Here is a messenger, Katego," said one of the soldiers. "He would have speech with Setlu, saying he brings news."

"Let him be brought in."

The two soldiers, pushing Baroa before them, crawled in through the aperture, and the Bushman found himself face to face with Setlu's chief councillor. There was a heap of live coals on a raised patch of the earth near the pole of the hut, and Katego, crouching over it in his sleeping-mat, could be seen plainly. He was an old man, of spare build, with jaws and nose that had gained for him the nickname of "the Wolf." In a land where good looks were exceedingly rare he was not noticeably peculiar, except for one feature, his mouth. In his youth Katego had been tossed by a bull, one horn of which ripped his mouth sideways in a most hideous contortion. The lower lip was drawn down till the bottom teeth and nearly the whole jaw were exposed to view. Even in his most gracious moods, Katego the Wolf snarled like a wolf, and when he was in a rage he seemed ready to bite anyone. And it was hard to tell when he was *not* in a rage. Baroa thought he was in one now, and wished that he had not come.

"What news bring you?" began Katego.

"I bring news of the wedding feast of Makani, the chief's son. Napo the Dwarf sent me."

"He that fought for the People of the Brand and slew Vokwana?" asked Katego, sharply.

"The same," said Baroa. "He and the Giant, that fought at the Place of Burning, as I did also, bade me come quickly to warn this kraal."

The snarl of the Wolf changed to an expression of the liveliest interest.

"Dwarf and Giant, be they at the kraal of Tetwiza?" he asked.

"They are prisoners there."

"We have heard of that fight, and of how Letchla was made great in his country," said Katego. "How comes it that such great fighters are held prisoners at Tetwiza's kraal? Go," and he turned to the soldiers. "Summon the chief, saying it is a matter of great urgency."

"Of all that they shall speak, when you see them," said Baroa, as the men departed. "For me, I have but to deliver the message into the ears of Setlu."

And in a few minutes Setlu came. A tall, upstanding man he was, very dark in colour, with a nose that was almost aquiline, deep-set eyes, and a high forehead. To him Baroa told his story and delivered his message, watching the face of Setlu as he did so, but reading no answer in it. He sat quite still and motionless till the tale was finished. Then he spoke.

"For this service I give thanks to thee, Bushman, and to those that sent thee." Next, turning to his counsellor, "Summon the soldiers," he said; and Katego went out.

The rousing of the kraal was a matter of moments only. In an amazingly short space of time every armed man was assembled before the chief's hut. There were not far short of two thousand men there, and they stood around in serried ranks under the starlight, now merging into the grey of dawn, while Setlu told them all that was afoot. He spoke clearly, but in level, passionless tones. They heard it in silence to the last word. Then, as he ceased speaking, a forest of spears shot up into the air, and a great shout went up:

"To the kraal of Tetwiza! To the kraal of Tetwiza!"

Setlu, too, raised his spear aloft, and when the noise died down he spoke again:

"Ay, children of Setlu, to the kraal of Tetwiza!—and your father shall lead you there, and bathe you in the blood of Tetwiza's people! But first I must speak

with Katego, here, and with Nabomba, the captains of my regiments. Then, when the messengers are here——"

But he got no further.

"Look!" cried Baroa the Bushman, shrilly.

All turned in the direction whither his hand pointed.

Dawn was breaking over the long line of low hills in the east. The valleys were full of mists, rolling in great billows like cotton wool, with little wisps rising up here and there to be chased by the morning breezes. The sky was grey and cloudy, with a faint tinge where the coming dawn painted it.

Sharply outlined against this pale streak of morning light was a hill, the nearer slopes of which were still wrapped in darkness. Coming across the hill the whole multitude beheld a file of men, and in its centre a group that carried something.

The messengers were arriving.

CHAPTER XXIII

Tells of a wedding party which could find no bride; how the Dwarf cheated Fate of a victim; how Hlapeli the doctor saw to the debt being paid; and how Dabazooki put death into the mouths of Tetwiza's messengers.

WHEN Dwarf and Giant returned again to the *lekhotla* before the chief's hut everything was in readiness for receiving the wedding party. A fire had been lighted in the centre of the open space. By its light they saw that some two hundred soldiers had lined up and formed a circle. On one side sat the chief and his councillors, on the other a great crowd of spectators merged into the mass of darkness beyond reach of the firelight. Visible from all parts of the circle was the bamboo arrangement, the use of which the Dwarf guessed would be demonstrated presently. Near to it sat a row of alleged musicians, armed with tom-toms.

A rattle of the tom-toms was the signal for the ceremony to begin. Immediately came a yelling and hand-clapping from somewhere in the distance. The women were conducting the bridal party to the chief's presence. The bride herself was not visible, it being a polite fiction that her virginal modesty must not be shocked by even glancing at her prospective husband thus early in the proceedings. Ordinarily she would not make her appearance till the third day of the ceremony. This was merely the formal introduction of the bridegroom to the chief; but the absence of the bride did not amount to much in any case, because there was not going to be any wedding.

The yelling and hand-clapping came nearer, and the bridal party entered the circle. Simultaneously there sprang into it from the opposite side an animated

scarecrow of thatch and bladders, waving a wand on the end of which was a human skull. This prancing nightmare was Hlapeli, the kraal doctor. He was sufficiently hideous, not to say terrifying, to have sent a thrill of envy into the soul of Keshwan had there been any wizardry afoot worth his serious attention. When a good fight loomed ahead, Keshwan was more interested in soldiering than sorcery.

As they stepped into the circle the people of Setlu looked round them in surprise. Most of them were three parts drunk, but not too drunk to see in some flash of intuition that the atmosphere was charged with hostility. The hand-clapping and yelling ceased, and there was a deep silence. The guests walked into the centre of the ring, and Makani stepped forward.

"O chief, I greet thee!" he said.

Tetwiza stood up amongst his councillors.

"And I, Tetwiza, greet thee, Makani. See!" and he threw down his assegai at the young man's feet.

Makani and every man of the wedding party did the same, this being a polite token of trust each in the other. The soldiers raised their spears and lowered them by way of a general salute. But Keshwan noticed that, at a sign of command from the young man Ratlali, some of the soldiers swiftly collected the assegais of Setlu's men and vanished with them.

Tetwiza sat down again, and girls came forward carrying pots of beer. Makani, however, waved them aside. He looked restive and ill at ease. He might, thought Napo, watching him narrowly, have overheard some scrap of conversation among the guards or had his suspicions aroused otherwise. He glanced round him furtively; then he asked:

"Where is the ox that should be slaughtered for a chief's son?"

"The slaughtering will be done soon," said Tetwiza, with a smile.

"When the bride comes to my father's kraal there will be ceremonies as befit a chief's son and a chief's daughter," said Makani, sullenly.

"The bride goes to thy father's kraal this night!" said Tetwiza.

Dead silence fell on everybody. Not a soul moved or spoke while these words sank into the rather muddled intelligence of Makani and his followers. That they were charged with a sinister and insulting purport everybody knew; because under no other circumstances could such a violation of the etiquette of marriage be really contemplated. According to the usage of these tribes, many ceremonies had yet to be performed. Feastings and drunken orgies must take place in the kraal of the bride's father; beasts must be killed, gifts exchanged, councils held and speeches made, lasting over a period of three days at least. Then the whole must be repeated, with appropriate additions, at the kraal of the bridegroom; so that a wedding of any consequence could not last less than a full week, and if the parties were of high standing would continue longer. Yet here was the contemptuous suggestion that on the very day the groom presented himself the bride should be handed over without form or ceremony. It was incredible! Makani's face darkened with anger.

"Know, then, O chief," he said, haughtily, "that if the bride comes to my father's kraal this night she comes as no bride of mine and no daughter of my father's house! But stray women are perchance plentiful in Tetwiza's kraal!"

"Peace!" said Tetwiza, with a gesture, "else thy tongue shall go with thee on the road which is measured by the length of a spear! The bride goes to thy father's kraal this night, but not without ceremony befitting so great an occasion. Here, O Makani, is the master of ceremonies ready to begin," and he pointed to Hlapeli.

Then began a savage comedy in which the hideous old doctor took the chief part, and of which the details, some of which could not be described in print, fascinated the assemblage. Not a word was spoken by the onlookers, and when one of Makani's women gave an affrighted scream it fell dead upon the silence. Only once did Makani himself speak. At the moment when he saw the comedy turned into a tragedy of revenge and bloodshed, he was moved to cry out in a loud voice:

"Blood shall pay for this, O chief!"

To which Tetwiza answered:

"And blood shalt thou have and all thy people!"

Hlapeli the doctor advanced into the centre of the ring and lifted up a thin, quavering voice:

"O Tetwiza, son of Makulmana, tell me what wouldst thou have me do?"

"I would have you search out a bride for Makani, son of Setlu!"

"A young bride or an old bride?"

"A young bride!"

"A bride fit for a prince from the people of Tetwiza, or a bride fit for a commoner from amongst those of his own kraal?"

"Search out the bride and let me judge, Hlapeli! Let her be young and handsome!"

While this was going on, the doctor was advancing towards the ring of spectators, in which hundreds of Tetwiza's women clustered. He waved in his right hand the hideous wand with the skull on it and began dancing slowly round the ring. At every few steps he halted, touched a woman with the skull, and cried out to Tetwiza the physical virtues of the woman he had found.

"A tall woman, O chief, well shaped and supple! . . . A young girl, O chief, fat as a grown cow. . . . A woman here, O Tetwiza, with eyes like the stars and a face that shines like the moon on a dark night! . . . A girl here with the strength of a bullock to till a man's fields and reap his corn! . . . A very small girl, O chief, and of strong build, though over fat! . . . One here, O Tetwiza, that is thin as the pole in the chief's hut and has large feet! . . ."

Thus he went round the ring, enumerating and describing, with such minuteness of detail as would have made any damsel with as much modesty as clothes burn with blushes. But in that land, where clothes and modesty were almost equally unknown, a blush (if it could be seen) would have been looked on as a disease. So nobody took any exception to what Hlapeli said, and some of the women looked pleased. To every description, as the doctor bawled it out, Tetwiza made answer, raising a pretended objection.

"Tall and supple maybe, but she would run from

her husband! . . . A grown cow kicks down the kraal-fence! . . . A shining face and a black heart, O Makani! . . . The strength of a bullock demands the food of an ox! . . . Small of build, easy to escape! . . . Large feet to stamp out a husband's cooking-fire!"—and so on, with other remarks that will not bear quoting; till at length Hlapeli had gone round the ring and was back at the starting place. Then he raised up his wand and cried:

"O chief, I have found no bride for Makani amongst the people of Tetwiza! Where, then, shall I look?"

"Look amongst the people of Setlu for a bride!"

There was a stir, then, in the group of Makani's followers. Keshwan noticed that the soldiers standing behind closed in. Makani himself looked down at his feet as though searching for his assegais, and started.

Hlapeli advanced to the group and began the farce over again. But this time his descriptions were of a different character. Each was a calculated insult that stung its victim like the lash of a whip.

"A girl, O chief, lean and scrawny as a bushrat! . . . One here, Tetwiza, who thinks herself young, but is toothless as a hag! . . . Another, O chief, who is young in years but wasted with evildoing. Such are the people of Setlu! . . . A woman, O Tetwiza, with teeth like a crocodile's! . . . A girl with the face of a horned beast and the limbs of a tree smitten by lightning! . . . And here, O chief and father, I perceive a witch, a witch!" He raised up his wand over his head, smote the shoulders of a terrified young girl with the skull, and screamed:

"*A witch! A witch!* Shall she serve as bride for the son of Setlu?"

"Ay," said Tetwiza, "let her be given as the bride of this wedding," and he motioned to a couple of his soldiers. "Let the son of Setlu have a witch for bride and blood for his wedding beer!"

It was then that the woman screamed, as the soldiers seized her—one scream, shrill, terrified, and piercing, which died echoless in the death-like silence. Not a soul moved as the soldiers brought her forth. Hlapeli was gone for a moment; whither and why was presently

apparent. Makani and his people looked on as if turned to stone, and the file of soldiers who had closed about them stood like statues. The red light of the fire glowed on the scene.

"You that came hither a virgin of Setlu's kraal shall return to-night a bride," said Tetwiza, with a mocking smile. "See the Master of the Ceremonies prepares for your nuptials?"

The girl and the whole company turned and looked whither he pointed. Hlapeli was untying the thongs on that bent bamboo which Napo had noticed on entering the kraal. The young girl, not understanding the use of this instrument, looked on with merely a vague, though terrified, curiosity. But Napo, knowing her for the victim, shuddered. In his country the torment that was then preparing was reserved only for traitors and the worst criminals. Here it was to be practised on one who had done no harm to her tormentors and was a mere child!

The victim, still wondering what was to be done, was being led across the open space by the two soldiers, and Hlapeli was waiting to receive her. He was reciting a sort of ode appropriate to the bridal, but full of horrible suggestion:

"Come, little one, to the husband who awaits thee!

"Come to the embrace of thy husband, who has waited so long!

"Put thy arms about the neck of thy husband and cling to him, and he will never leave thee!

"Kiss him but once and he is thine always, for this husband, though he has many wives, never changes! Caress him and his arms shall be everlastingly about thee! Yet be kind, be gentle, for he is a proud husband, who hath choice of the loveliest of women! Come, come quickly! Why linger when a husband's kiss awaits thee?"

And so on, in a high falsetto, with that hideous skull beating time to the tune, and the girl creeping step by step to her doom. Napo, however, had risen from his seat, and just as the soldiers thrust the girl, shuddering and fearful, into the old doctor's hands, he lifted up his hand and cried out:

"O chief, this girl must not die!"

But he saw that if she was to be saved he must himself act quickly. Already Hlapeli had fastened the thongs around the girl's shoulders and was fixing them to her feet.

"Cease!" cried Napo in a voice of thunder, and next instant he had bounded across the circle, had seized the amazed doctor by the waist, and had lifted him up and put him down again a few feet away as easily as though he were a child. One of the soldiers raised his spear, either to stab Napo or the girl, it mattered not which. The next second he was sprawling on his back from one blow of the Dwarf's gigantic fist. Then in a moment Keshwan the Giant was by the Dwarf's side, and these three, the Dwarf, the Giant and the girl, faced the multitude.

There was a pause of amazement and consternation. Everybody was stunned at the dramatic suddenness of Napo's action. The soldier lay on his back as if dead, and Hlapeli stood for a few seconds just where he was and wondered why the world did not come to an end. Then he shook himself and his bladders and bags in a paroxysm of fury, and let a curse come out, ripping and tearing, straight for the head of Napo, which, if it had hit the Dwarf, would have shattered him to fragments on the spot. But it missed him somehow, and whistled over everybody's heads, harming no one; and next day Hlapeli himself found a rock on the hill opposite the kraal which had been hit by his curse and shivered into six pieces!

Tetwiza, also, was dumbfounded, but after the first moment of surprise he sprang up, black with rage. Napo, however, got in the first word.

"In that land whence I come, Tetwiza," he said, sternly, "women are not given to the death like dogs while men have the wit or strength to save them! If any man there be of Makani's party against whom thou canst claim feud of blood, let him be judged and slain, if slay thou must! But if any man here claims that of a right this girl shall die, then fetch spear and shield and let him do battle with me first!"

There was a murmur of approval from some quarters

in the crowd, and the young captain that was named Ratlali stepped forward.

"I claim it, O chief!" he cried, and the murmur of approval waxed louder.

"And I!" cried the other captain, named Sigwa.

"Then if it please the chief, we will fight now, the two of you coming together, for time presses," said the Dwarf, calmly. "But know, O chief, that I seek no quarrel over this matter. It is my word that the girl lives, else my life shall be forfeit to it! And I say this," he added, with a gesture of contempt, "for this attack upon the kraal of Setlu"—here Makani gave a start and turned round—"thou must find another general to lead thy army if any spear is dipped in a woman's blood!"

"If the blood of this woman flows," put in Keshwan, solemnly, "not the whole of thy army shall save the Black Ox from drowning in it!"

There was a murmur of another sort at this.

"He prophesies," said one of the councillors; and Tetwiza, remembering the black magic with the spears, and how this travelling wizard told everything that was in his heart, doubted the expediency of having more words on the subject. Moreover, time was getting short. It was wearing towards midnight, and Napo had let out the secret. Tetwiza, making a virtue of necessity, turned from the Dwarf without another word.

"So be it," he said, addressing the two captains. "That right which ye claim shall be put to the test of your spears in due season, but not now; for there are greater matters afoot." Then, turning suddenly towards Makani, he said with fury:

"Dog of Setlu's kraal, heard you what that man said? Know then that this night we begin to pay that old score we owe your house for its robberies and oppressions! Hark now: you and all with you are prisoners! Ye are trapped like bushrats, and your lives hang in the balance! We send now to your kraal messengers carrying a token. Slay!" and he made a fierce gesture towards one of his soldiers.

"Not with the spear, not with the spear!" screamed out old Hlapeli, in a shrill treble. He hobbled into the ring again. "Bring me a young man that shall be

wed to this bride of Death—a young man, comely and fine and of good stature, meet for a bridal! Stand away, Dwarf, and you, Giant. Stand away with that girl, and make way for the bridegroom!"—and he touched on the shoulder with his skull one of the young men of Makani's party. Instantly the man was seized by a couple of soldiers and dragged towards the bamboo.

What passed in the next few moments passed with horrible swiftness. Keshwan, new to this form of torture, which was introduced to the country by Maponda, looked on fascinated, but the girl beside him covered her eyes with her hands. He saw the young man made fast quickly at the feet and shoulders by ox-hide thongs of great strength and thickness. The shoulder-thongs were in turn fastened to the tip of the arching bamboo, and the foot-thongs to the stake that had been driven in the ground. Then he saw Hlapeli, still cursing and storming like a devil, make loose the thongs that fastened the bamboo in its bent position—allow the bamboo to spring back only an inch or two—fasten the thongs again—then undo them and let the bamboo spring back an inch farther; and so on, repeating the process, inch by inch, till—well, till the poor, writhing, howling wretch had not a whole bone or a loose sinew in his body; and at length dropped forward, broken and dead!

It was the rack of the Inquisition over again, but more primitive. Could these poor, untutored savages have had but a few lessons from the great civilised nations who had gone before them, but had not lightened their barbarism with their gentle teachings, how much more picturesque and painful that ceremony might have been!

Hlapeli cut the victim down with his own hands, and in a blind fury spat on the limp corpse.

"Go back to the kraal that bred you and other like carrion!" he yelled.

"And now let the messengers come forward," said Tetwiza.

There was a movement in the ranks of the soldiers. Some two hundred of them stepped forward, and about

a dozen placed themselves around the body. Each as he came threw down his assegai and shield; for they were to go unarmed. A stretcher of interlaced boughs was brought and the body put on it.

"Take my word to the chief Setlu," cried Tetwiza, in a loud voice, so that everyone might hear. "Tell him that Tetwiza sends this token, that if thrice the number of the cattle he stole from me are not returned by to-morrow's sunset, every man and woman of his tribe that stands here shall die by my spear, and his son with them! Go, my messengers! And ye, soldiers, take these dogs of a dog's kraal, and put them under a guard so strong that none shall escape!"

"And give Setlu this message, too," cried Dabazooki the wizard, then paused with sudden and dramatic solemnity. Everybody stood still—chief, councillors and soldiers—and for a whole minute he let them stand there, waiting. Then his voice boomed into the solemn silence:

"Tell him, O messengers of Tetwiza, that if he sends either across the hills by the short path or by the long road a bushrat on two legs, carrying a dead goat, he will find there three droves of black oxen with their horns to the road and their tails to the hill!"

Something like a shudder swept through the assemblage, and something very like a laugh through Napo.

Soldiers closed round the wedding party and hemmed them in, and the girl with them. At the same instant the messengers, bearing their dead burden, marched out of the circle and left the kraal.

Less than an hour later the regiments of Sigwa and Ratlali had set out for their appointed stations.

CHAPTER XXIV

In which a herald delivers a presumptuous message, reveals a plan, and pays a stiff penalty; Setlu sends a royal gift to an old enemy; horns and spears travel along the same road; and the Black Ox gets half-way out of the water.

DOWN the slope of the hill towards Setlu's kraal came the messengers from Tetwiza.

Presently they disappeared into the valley. Instantly an order was given by Setlu to the assembled soldiers. Morning twilight still reigned, and, under shelter of the semi-darkness and of the mists which had obscured their presence from the unsuspecting messengers, a movement was swiftly carried out. A hundred men of Katego's regiment ran with amazing speed to one side of the cattle-enclosures near the foot of Setlu's stronghold. They ran crouching in the shadows of the stone walls and were soon lost to view. A hundred men of Nabomba's regiment ran to the other side. The rest of the soldiers melted and disappeared. Setlu himself moved away between the huts, and Baroa hid himself in a convenient angle of the kraal-fence. Only a few old men and women remained visible, and these were instructed what to do. When the messengers appeared, coming up the hill, the kraal seemed to be asleep or empty.

They advanced to within fifty yards of the cattle-enclosures. Then a small party was seen to detach itself and advance with something which they carried on a litter. They came on up the hillside to within twenty yards or so of the kraal-gate. Then the spokesman of the party advanced a step, while the litter was deposited on the ground.

"Awake, ye sleepers!" he cried. "We bring greeting from Tetwiza and a gift for Setlu!"

One of the old men pottering about the gate looked up, shaded his eyes with his hand, and called out, crustily:

"Setlu sleeps, being heavy with beer, and our men sleep also for the same reason. What bring ye from Tetwiza?"

"Summon the chief swiftly!" cried the herald. "We have words for him, and Tetwiza calls us to return."

"Wait, wait," grumbled the old man, stopping for a signal. "I am feeble, and our people sleep heavily. Why come ye thus early, having travelled by night, when the day would have served?" A dog barked down by the cattle-enclosures. "Nevertheless, since ye are hurried and would be going—to drink beer at the feasting, doubtless!—I will see if I can awaken Setlu. Bring your gift nearer."

"Nay," said the herald, grimly. "Better it abide here, lest some that see it might think poorly of Tetwiza's skill in the choice of presents!"

The old man shuffled off into the kraal, smiling somewhat. Presently he returned, and called out:

"The chief comes, though heavy with sleep."

There was a pause. Then Baroa, watching from his hiding-place, saw the chief go out of the gate, walking slowly and alone. He walked unsteadily and went yawning.

"Why come ye thus early?" he asked, grumbling. "We drank beer last night in honour of Tetwiza and the wedding. We are all heavy with sleep, and my soldiers lie like logs. Nevertheless, out of my great friendship for the chief Tetwiza——" and he yawned again, leaving the remark unfinished. Presently he reached the little party and looked down at the litter, which was covered with a sleeping-mat.

"A gift from the chief," said the herald, "and he sends with it this message, O Setlu: That unless thou returnest to him now, by the drovers who await yonder, thrice the number of the cattle stolen from him by force of arms, every man and woman of thy people that is at

his place now shall perish at sundown, and thy son with them!"

He paused for a second, as if to note the effect of this ultimatum, then added:

"And to this message Dabazooki the wizard commanded that we should add the following, the purport of which, being hidden from me, shall be revealed doubtless in good time by his magic: Tell Setlu that if he sends either across the hills by the short path or by the long road a bushrat on two legs, carrying a dead goat, he will find there three droves of black oxen, with their horns to the road and their tails to the hill!"

Baroa, who could see and hear everything from his place of hiding, and understood the message perfectly, opened his mouth to laugh, remembered in time that he must keep silence, and swallowed hard instead.

The herald ceased, and as he did so he threw back the covering from the litter, and Setlu looked down. There stared up at him the mauled and distorted victim of Hlapeli's devilry.

And now Baroa beheld what he knew to be a piece of very clever acting on the part of Setlu. For the chief, who had guessed from the Bushman's story what this "gift" really was, glanced at the body of the murdered man, drew back horrified, pretended to be gathering his drunken wits about him, and cried out with a foolish hiccough:

"It is Poona, the son of Matiwan! Why has Tetwiza, who is my friend, done this thing? What message is this ye bring, demanding my cattle? Where are my soldiers?" and he turned, hiccoughing, towards the kraal. "They sleep, drunken with beer, else would I smite you where ye stand, dogs of Tetwiza!" He flamed up as if in a sudden rage, and called shrilly:

"Where are the soldiers, where are the soldiers?"

Two or three men staggered and stumbled through the gateway, rubbing their eyes.

"Thy soldiers have drunk well," said the herald, with an insolent laugh. "Hark now, O Setlu, for we are minded to return to our kraal quickly. Our drovers wait yonder for the cattle, because we feared treachery. Summon thy soldiers to the top of the hill by the gate-

way and let them stand there unarmed. If only one advances towards us, the drovers shall fly swiftly back to Tetwiza, leaving thy cattle but taking the death-signal for thy people. But if thou wouldst save the life of thy son and of all with him, let thy soldiers stand there while the drovers go down and themselves drive the cattle away. Then to-night thy son and those with him shall be sent back to thee. Choose now, and send that old mumbler to the kraal with thy orders!"

Setlu, drunken, dazed, and foolish, wrung his hands and protested in a muddled way, as though he really understood very little of what was passing. But Baroa saw him measure that herald with his eye, for all that!

The old man went back to the kraal, whence there presently emerged a company of men, some staggering, all grumbling, and many yawning. They bore no arms. Most of them sat down on the bare hillside, and appeared to be half asleep again; some called out complainingly to know why they were disturbed from their slumbers. A few women straggled in amongst them and began railing at them. Even the Bushman was half deceived, and Tetwiza's messengers completely so. The herald made a sign to the waiting drovers, and Setlu stared stupidly. Then the whole party moved down towards the cattle-enclosures. The drovers went laughing.

"Such soldiers as these I have never seen!" exclaimed one.

"Had we but spears we could go in amongst them and slay them to a man," laughed another.

"Few enough to slay, even without spears," said a third.

"Nay," said the first speaker, "Setlu has many soldiers, but most are drunk or sleeping, as ye saw by these heavy-eyed swine that came to the kraal-gate. Methinks we shall have small ado with such men on the morrow!"

"Silence, fool!" said one of his companions, striking him. "Would ye give warning of our plans and so spoil them? See, the cattle are awaiting us."

The men were filing in at the kraal-gate now. The herald shouted an order as the last man went in.

"Drive all the cattle out!" he said.

These were the last words he spoke. For, as they left his lips, Setlu, his whole attitude and demeanour changed in a single instant, cried in a loud voice:

"Ay, O liar and dog, all shall be driven out!"

At the same instant he hurled himself upon the herald with ferocious strength, snatched his assegai, for this man alone of the party carried one, and stabbed him through the heart. It was done almost in the twinkling of an eye, and yet not more suddenly than the attack which Katego and Nabomba now hurled on the ambushed men in the cattle-kraal. In less time than it takes to tell, the kraal and its vicinity was alive with soldiers. They leapt over the low fences from a hundred hiding-places, and they swarmed in at the entrance; while down the hillside rushed a whole regiment that a moment ago had been lolling in drunken stupidity on the grass!

Unarmed, taken by surprise, unable to escape in any direction, and seeing that resistance was futile, the drovers surrendered to a man—all, at least, save the twenty or so who had received their death thrusts in the first shock of the attack. Not a man of Setlu's regiments was so much as scratched. Indeed, many of them came out of the kraal laughing and grumbling, and asking why the women had not been ordered to attack, since the fight was with girls and babies.

"The women shall have their share," said Setlu. "Let these dogs of Tetwiza be kept in the kraal under a strong guard of the women, well-armed and aided by our old men. Drive forth the cattle, Katego, and be swift, since the journey is a long one."

This was soon done, and food was then served, for by now the whole army had assembled. While they ate the chief talked with the Bushman, who explained to him and his captains the meaning of that message from Keshwan. There was talk then of the attack on the regiments of Tetwiza, some of which, it was clear from Keshwan's message, would be found on the long road where the cattle must travel, and some on the short path over the hill. Setlu accordingly gave orders for dividing his army into two sections, which were to go, the one, numbering nine hundred men under Katego, with the

cattle, to attack Tetwiza's soldiers wherever they might be encountered on the long road, and the other, numbering about twelve hundred men, under Setlu himself, to surprise the other regiments which must be waiting on the shorter way.

The meal was soon finished; and, within an hour of the arrival of the messengers, the crest of that sharp hill where the watchers had first seen them was black with a huge herd of oxen, mixed in with which went Setlu's men. They looked back from the top of the hill ere they passed over. Away down in the valley they saw the rest of Setlu's army, with which went the Bushman, running swiftly. So far everything promised well.

Meanwhile Sigwa, with his three regiments to the number of over two thousand, waited patiently at the place he had chosen till the messengers should appear on their way back from Setlu's kraal. Keshwan waited with him, but not so patiently, for he knew what hung in the balance just then. There was a bend in the road here, where it turned up out of a deep and narrow valley and crossed an abrupt hill beyond. Keshwan had suggested halting at this place for a good reason, and he it was that kept watch for the first sign of the cattle coming along the road. But, as it happened, he was forestalled; for, after a long time, one of Sigwa's men, having climbed an embankment at the roadside (which, in fact, was little more than a cattle-track, for roads as we know them were luxuries not yet thought of in that part of the world), saw the smoke of dust rising in the distance.

"They are coming!" he cried out; and Sigwa ordered his men to rise up from where they were sitting.

"Setlu has sent all his cattle," laughed a soldier, when they, too, saw the slowly moving pillar of dust on the sky-line. "Soon we shall have Setlu as well!"

"And the beer at his kraal and the women," said another. "That girl whom Hlapeli would have slain will make a wife for one of us."

"Not for us, but for the Dwarf, possibly," said a third speaker. "Since he gave her life he will doubtless claim reward."

"And if this venture comes to a good ending, Tetwiza will give him that girl, I doubt not, and as many others for wife as he wishes."

The talk went idly on, while the cattle came ambling along the dusty track and were presently near the bend. There Keshwan, standing alert and watchful at Sigwa's side, saw that the whole herd seemed suddenly to take fright—as well they might, with a hundred assegais simultaneously pricked into their flanks!

"It will go well," thought Keshwan, tightening the grasp on his shield-strap.

Next moment there was a yell from the drovers, a bellow or two from the oxen, shouts, whistles, and laughter, and the whole herd came thundering down the hillside like an avalanche. How any of the soldiers mixed in amongst them escaped being trampled on was marvellous. Some, indeed, were knocked down and injured, but they were up again instantly and rushing forward, drovers, cattle, soldiers, and all!

The first surprise of this sudden stampede moved the soldiers of Tetwiza to a roar of laughter. Some, however, made as if to spring into the roadway and head the cattle off. Others shouted to them to let be, while others threw up their arms and gesticulated at the maddened beasts. The drovers, however, were fleet of foot, and fifty at least of them rushed to the head of the advancing herd and suddenly turned it. Then the laugh died in the throats of Sigwa's men, for suddenly they saw that the whole herd of a thousand cattle was thundering down on them!

It took them a second or two to grasp the fact. Then, with a yell of furious expostulation at the clumsiness of the drovers, they broke and scattered. Many of them went down in the rush of the terrified beasts and were trampled on; others, cursing and shouting, ran this way and that, and turned presently as if to assist in rounding up the herd. It was then that they realised for the first time that enemies and not friends were among them. For at a shout from Keshwan, and an answering cry from Katego, behold the ground was suddenly alive with stabbing warriors!

Never was surprise more unexpected and complete!

The soldiers of Tetwiza, utterly unprepared for the catastrophe, broken up into groups, or, flying here and there, were dumbfounded with amazement and paralysed with the suddenness of the onslaught. Many of them fell where they stood, before they could strike a blow, and others were caught as they ran hither and thither in the confusion and put to the spear. Indeed, to Keshwan's excited fancy, it seemed that every man would be killed, as a score or so were, before they awoke to the knowledge that they had been trapped. But in this he reckoned without Sigwa.

That warlike individual was taken by surprise like the rest, but he recovered soonest, and to some purpose. He had sprung on one side, well out of the way of the stampeding cattle, and he it was who first saw that the armed warriors of Setlu were stabbing his men. Grasping the position quickly, he shouted above the din:

"They are enemies! We are betrayed! Soldiers of Tetwiza, follow me!"

His voice carried like a trumpet, and in a moment he was heading some two hundred of his men in the direction of a small but steep and rock-strewn kopje which stood at the head of the valley. Keshwan, seeing this, shouted to some of Setlu's soldiers, and a race began. But Sigwa reached the kopje first, scaled it with his followers, and stood at bay, a formidable force in such a position. Only about a hundred of Setlu's men were free to attack him, for the others were engaged here and there in desperate hand-to-hand fighting with stragglers and groups of the enemy. Katego himself was hard pressed by a rally of Sigwa's soldiers, and here a fierce fight was in progress, in which at least a hundred men were slain on both sides. Keshwan noted this as he sped on up the side of the kopje, but knew that he could give no aid. Farther up the valley he perceived some of the soldiers who had lain in hiding gathering the cattle together. This much he saw ere his men and Sigwa's met in the shock of battle.

The combat was sharp, desperate, and bloody. The defenders, furious and at bay, fought like madmen or demons. They stood in a small compact ring, for the crest of the kopje was not wide, and stabbed down-

wards at their assailants, who spread out as they drew near, endeavouring to attack them in front and rear.

For a time the advantage was with the defenders, and many of Keshwan's men bit the dust, to rise no more. But Sigwa's band was weakening also. In the first onslaught full twenty fell, and though the others beat back their assailants for the time being, the respite was a short one. Keshwan, behind a great shield snatched from a dead enemy, fought like the giant that he was; and when he saw the first attack repulsed, he gathered his men instantly for the next.

No such rush had Sigwa seen in his many battles. His soldiers went down before the onslaught like grass in the wind. The soldiers of Setlu literally hewed their way into them, and in another moment the fight was raging on the summit of the kopje, friend and foe inextricably mixed together in a wild confusion of stabbing forms.

Twice in that fierce *mêlée* Keshwan and Sigwa came face to face. But it was not fated that either should slay or be slain, though each was sorely wounded. For on the first occasion, as shield was raised against shield, the press of struggling humanity drove them asunder; and on the second, when they were ready to spring at each other's throats, a soldier fell forward and Sigwa's spear was buried in his heart. Keshwan laughed and shook his great head like a lion, but Sigwa fell back, for he was in danger of being hemmed in.

For some moments the issue hung in the balance, and how it would have gone there is no knowing, had not Katego come to the rescue. The fighting below the kopje had been as fierce and bloody as that on it, but Katego's men gained the victory, though not without heavy loss. Had the fierce men of Tetwiza's tribe been able to re-form after the first panic caused by the stampede, things might have gone ill with Katego, heavily outnumbered as he was. The groups, however, being scattered in the attack, fought separately, and as a body of Setlu's men overcame their opponents, they reinforced other small bodies and gradually swept the field. Many of the enemy took flight, but scores died where they had fought.

Katego, with blood and sweat pouring into his eyes, looked up and saw what was afoot on the kopje. Shouting to his men, he rushed up the rough, boulder-strewn rise, and Sigwa saw him coming. He knew then that the day was lost, but he meant if he could to retrieve it shortly.

"Fly for your lives, soldiers of Tetwiza!" he shouted above the noise of battle. Then at a bound he turned and fled down the far side of the kopje. Keshwan, seeing him go, would have followed; but he, too, was hemmed in at that moment, and a moment after it was too late. The remnant of Sigwa's band broke and scattered, though few indeed reached the foot of the kopje alive. For here some of Katego's soldiers, perceiving what was afoot, overtook and slew them.

Sigwa was gone, and the fight was over.

Keshwan looked round at the heaps of dead and dying that strewed the bloodstained kopje and dotted the valley below.

"A good fight!" he said, stooping to wipe his spear in the short grass.

He collected the remnant of his men, and together they went down the kopje. Here Keshwan and Katego met, and in a few words the rest of the Dwarf's plan was unfolded.

"Ay, it was a good fight!" said Katego, repeating the other's words.

"But there is more to do yet," said Keshwan. "Are the cattle ready?"

CHAPTER XXV

In which the Bushman has a bird's-eye view of an ambuscade and sees a strange attack; a regiment of soldiers is changed into Little Girls, and a captain gets a new commission; the baboons come down the hill; and Ratlali goes the way that Sigwa went.

MEANWHILE the main body of Setlu's soldiers, under the chief himself, with Nabomba as second in command, was speeding swiftly along the steep, broken path the Bushman had taken. Baroa went with them, partly as a guide, for Keshwan's message had suggested to him the most likely spot where Ratlali's regiment would be waiting.

Setlu's regiment climbed up the far slope of the hill that looked down on the valley and the stream. At the top they halted in a gorge almost directly above the spot where the Bushman thought Ratlali's men would be. Baroa climbed farther, crawled out on a spike of jutting rock, and from this vantage peered down, sure enough, straight upon the heads of Ratlali's soldiers. It was a broad, open place, closed behind by the mass of the hill on whose summit Baroa clung like a baboon among the rocks, but opening in front upon the roadway along which the cattle would come. The men were resting, oblivious of the fact that a relentless foe bore down on them from behind. Some of them at a little distance were observing the roadway, to give signal the moment the cattle appeared in view. But Baroa, being very much higher, could see farther, and presently he saw the thing he was looking for.

Far off along the cattle-track came a slowly moving spiral of dust, and in its midst a black mass which he

knew for the cattle of Setlu. But suddenly it stopped; and as the dust died down, Baroa was surprised to see what looked like a body of men, no bigger than ants (for they were several miles distant), cross the cattle-track and disappear somewhere beside the road. After that, still puzzled, his sharp eyes made out that a little black dot, which must have been a man, was coming quickly along the road alone. It passed into his mind that there had been a disaster to Katego's troops, and he watched and waited with bated breath. But what had happened was this.

After the fight with Sigwa, Katego and the Giant took counsel and, being far reduced in numbers, bethought them how they might trap some of Ratlali's soldiers, and so weaken his regiments before the second battle. The idea was Keshwan's; and he, indeed, was the only person who could carry it out without revealing the presence of Setlu's soldiers on the road. He knew where Tetwiza's remaining regiments were halted, and accordingly, when a mile or more from the spot, he elected to go forward with a tale that the drovers were in difficulties with the cattle, and so draw at least some of Ratlali's men into an ambuscade. About half a mile from the place where Baroa saw the cattle halted was a spot most admirably adapted to such a purpose. On each side of the road was a donga of sufficient depth to hide a man crouching; and long enough to accommodate five times the number of Katego's men. At one point the road narrowed and took a sharp turn; and it was planned that the moment Ratlali's warriors reached the spot, the ambush should spring out and attack them in the rear.

So Keshwan came along the road alone, having first bathed himself in a stream to rid himself of the blood and dust of the fight. His wounds, though many, were not severe, and such as he could attribute, if Ratlali asked questions, to a stampede of the cattle. Baroa, watching from his place on the hill, saw him approach Ratlali's column, and wondered greatly. The two men met and conversed for a few moments; then an order was given; and the next thing the Bushman saw was a company of Ratlali's soldiers, to the number of about

two hundred, swinging down the roadway, and Keshwan leading them.

When, about half an hour later, these men approached the ambuscade, not a sign was to be seen anywhere of men or beasts. The soldiers were singing a chant and marching at their ease, neither prepared for or dreaming of an attack. They were singing the praises of Tetwiza. He was mighty. He was a great fighter. *Wow-wow!* His spear was a stroke of lightning that never missed. His frown withered his enemies. In the whole world there was not a chief so terrible. *E-wee-we!* As for his soldiers—well, here they were. Look! See them and tremble. *Yi-yi!* The earth shook when they marched. They were lions for courage, monkeys for cleverness, and as for their swiftness, they——

Just at this moment the boasters arrived at the fateful spot; and the next second, without so much as a shout of warning, their enemies were upon them.

To say that they were taken by surprise would be to put it mildly. So thunderstruck were these two hundred ferocious warriors that they practically collapsed where they stood! Keshwan laughed till his sides ached, though not at the spectacle of unready men being hewn down; for, truth to tell, scarce a dozen were killed in that astonishing *mêlée*. The soldiers of Setlu, being at least three against one, flung themselves bodily upon the soldiers of Tetwiza from behind, and disarmed them before they could strike a blow! The few who attempted a hopeless resistance were killed and their bodies cast into the donga. For the rest, in ten minutes there was not a man left who had shield, spear, or assegai, and a more shamefaced set of swashbucklers never faced laughing conquerors.

"Where are your courage now and your cleverness and your swiftness, ye boasters of the Regiment of Little Girls?" said Katego with biting scorn; and the men faced him, their heads hanging.

"Give us our spears," said the leader of the company, furiously, for he well knew the disgrace of this capture was hardly to be borne. "Give us our spears, and let us fight singly, one against two, one against ten even, if ye wish, so long as we die fighting and not disgraced!"

"That is well spoken," said Keshwan, his laughter finished. "Mayhap ye shall fight against such odds some day, but not now. And you that have made this request, Setlu shall create Captain of the Girls till that time comes and the disgrace of this day is wiped out."

The young man, who was named Qedini, looked puzzled for all his rage.

"Setlu is no chief of ours," he began, but Katego cut him short. There was no time for explanations.

"Look you," he said, sharply, "Ratlali awaits us on the road yonder expecting cattle, of which we have fewer, many as they are, than shall appease that thief and traitor, Tetwiza! Ye, then, Regiment of Girls, shall be of the cattle that are driven before us as a gift for the wedding feast. Form in the road here before the drovers, and any man that so much as moves to escape or utters a cry, that man shall die instantly!"

Short of killing his captives, which Katego dared not do, since he well knew that Setlu looked ahead to the material strengthening of his tribe from the remnants of Tetwiza's, there was no way of dealing with them but this. To let the men go after disarming them would be to give Ratlali warning of his approach. So he was forced to take them with him, and run the risk of their escaping in the fight and seizing arms against him.

Presently, as Baroa, watching afar off, tried to make out what was doing, and guessed something of it—whereat his opinion of the Giant went up some degrees—he saw that spiral of dust again. The whole cavalcade was coming forward. As it did so, Setlu, at a signal from the Bushman, brought his regiments stealthily up the slope till they were lying hid on the very crest of the krantz overlooking Ratlali.

"All has gone well," thought Setlu, from his place on the hill.

"All has gone well," thought Ratlali, watching from his place in the valley; for presently the advance of the cattle was visible to him also. He gave a command to his men, and they began to rise up here and there. The cattle were still far away, and the men formed up leisurely. Gradually, however, they came nearer, and the watchers could see the drovers running beside them,

and the beasts swinging along the dusty track at a lumbering trot. Ratlali, watching with keen eyes, suddenly started at something he saw. As the cloud of swirling dust was broken for an instant by a puff of wind, he caught one glimpse of a black form that darted out from amongst the moving cattle, handed to one of the drovers a spear, and then darted in again.

"Whence came that man," thought Ratlali, puzzling his brain, "and why armed and plumed?" He had caught the gleam of the sunlight on white cocks' feathers. The action was quick and furtive, and some instinct told him this man could not possibly be one of his own soldiers. Next second he saw the same thing repeated on the other side of the herd, a man stepping out briskly from behind or amongst the cattle and handing a drover his spear. He thought, indeed, that he saw it done a third time, for he caught a glint of something like a weapon. But just then the cloud of fine white dust rolled back, and that part of the herd was hidden from view.

"Something is amiss," thought Ratlali. At the same moment a stone came crashing down the steep krantz behind and bounded almost to his feet.

"Baboons," said a soldier near by. But Ratlali, uneasy and disturbed, he knew not why, turned and searched the face of the krantz sharply. A baboon, truly, for he saw it leap from behind a rock to the shelter of another; yet not a baboon either, for, in the single second that it came within the line of his vision, Ratlali caught again the glint of light on white feathers and something that gleamed like a spear.

He was a man who thought quickly and acted on instinct.

"To the road!" he cried, suddenly, and sprang forward.

A dozen men of the regiment sprang after him. The remainder, however, held back, thinking he wanted a few men only to head off the cattle. Ratlali looked over his shoulder, saw that he was not followed, and shouted:

"To the road, soldiers of Tetwiza! We are attacked!"

The soldiers, amazed and supposing him to be demented, looked this way and that, but saw nothing save the approaching cattle, now only a few hundred yards away. Some of them, however, ran down into the roadway to join their captain; and it was just then that Keshwan, too, realised that something was amiss. For he saw Ratlali with shield in position and spear raised; and next moment he saw fifty men pour down into the road to join him.

"Stampede the cattle!" shouted Keshwan, for his sharp eyes, searching the krantz, had seen the men of Setlu swarming down into the valley like a drove of monkeys. He had meant to catch Ratlali between two fires, unawares; now there was need for decisive action.

There was a bellow of rage and pain as again the maddened beasts suddenly rushed forward, straight for the line of soldiers drawn up across the track in front of them. A shout of astonishment and consternation swept through the ranks of Ratlali's men. It was changed to a yell of fury a moment later. For at that moment, in what was surely the strangest shock of battle ever seen on the field of war, the cattle and men met, with a mingled thunder of trampling hoofs and clashing shields, the noise of which went up to Setlu and his men and made them pause. Baroa, from his pinnacle of rock high upon the krantz above, looked down and beheld all that happened.

In the first fury of the impact both men and beasts went down writhing to the ground, the men crushed and trampled on, the beasts speared and bellowing. Many of the men, however, darted to one side, while the cattle in the rear ranks broke and fled. Others rushed on, mad with fear, and against these some of the soldiers, still hazy as to the exact cause of this strange catastrophe, pitted themselves with shield and assegai. Baroa saw a man tossed, gored to death and trampled on, and the bull that did it slain next moment by a dozen thrusts. He saw a small mob of furious oxen rush blindly into a group of surprised soldiers, scatter them, and pass on thundering along the road and out of sight. Then he saw that here and there man

was fighting man, some singly, others in little groups; that already the roadway was dotted with fallen forms; that a rally had been made of a compact mass of Ratlali's men, and a fierce fight was in progress between them and the main body of Katego's already depleted regiment.

Indeed, this fight bade fair to go against Katego and rout him, for his force, weakened in the fighting with Sigwa, was outnumbered by at least three to one. From being the attacker in the first rush, Katego was now on the defensive, and was being driven back from the roadway on to a little rise that bordered it. Here, thought Baroa, if he could make a stand till help came from Setlu, all would be well, but if he was pressed back into the grassy depression which was behind him, then Ratlali's men would be able to pour down upon and overwhelm him.

And sure enough Katego *was* pressed back. He gained the ridge at the roadside and made a stand there for a few moments, fighting desperately. Keshwan, fighting at his side, saw the hideous lips of the old Wolf beslavered and foaming, and blood spurting from a dozen wounds. His own case was but little better. In the fight with Sigwa he had received a spear-thrust in the thigh and a stab in the left arm; and now, as they were driven back, foot by foot, it was all he could do to keep his shield up and defend himself from the rain of blows. Nevertheless, as occasion offered, he got in a blow here and a thrust there, for his great height and the length of his reach told for him.

"Would that the Dwarf fought here with me!" he thought, remembering that fierce conflict in the gateway of Vokwana's kraal.

But the Dwarf, according to arrangement, was waiting with Tetwiza and his councillors a few miles farther along the road. Moreover, there was no time for repining; Ratlali was pressing the attack with great daring and splendid courage. He, too, was wounded in many places. Once the spear was wrested from his grasp and he fought with his bare hands, till he secured another. Now and again, above the ding-dong of the fight, his voice could be heard urging his men to

redoubled fury, and each time that he raised it thus a rush was made and the defenders were driven back.

The stand on the ridge was a short one. For a moment it seemed as though Katego's men, seeing their peril if they were swept down into the hollow, would carry the day by the sheer desperation with which they fought. But they were outnumbered; and a well-timed charge, in which the enemies fought breast to breast with the rage and energy of beasts, caused their ranks to waver, tremble for a moment, and then break in confusion down the steep slope behind.

"Now we are lost!" thought Katego the Wolf. As they went down Ratlali's men rained upon them from above a perfect torrent of blows with spear and assegai. Fifty of Katego's men fell dead or dying, and the grass was slippery with blood. Keshwan, aiming a blow at Ratlali himself, lost his footing, and rolled over—and thereby saved his life, for Ratlali's spear, aimed at his heart, passed above his head as he fell. Baroa, seeing this incident, thought also that the day was lost. But he was mistaken.

All this while—and it was really shorter than appears, so fierce and furious was the fighting—Setlu's regiments were swarming silently but swiftly down the krantz.

It was just as Keshwan went down that they reached the level of the valley and bounded with a great shout over the little stream. Ratlali, hearing that roar of voices, looked up; and for one moment the thought crossed him that these were soldiers come from his own kraal to the rescue. But immediately he knew otherwise; for the advancing regiments of Setlu parted at that instant, and he saw that whoever these were they intended to surround him. One regiment of six hundred, under Setlu himself, came straight for the grassy depression where the fight was raging. The other, under Nabomba, made to the left, with the object of getting into the roadway and cutting off retreat in that quarter.

Ratlali, however, had seen this ruse in time, and at once he gave the order: "Soldiers of Tetwiza, fly, for we are surrounded!"

Keshwan and Katego heard that shout, too, and they answered it.

"Charge, men of Setlu!" yelled Keshwan, springing to his feet again; and with that he headed the rush up the slope and back on to the hard-won ridge. Ratlali's men fought gamely and furiously as they retreated, though but few of them gained the ridge alive. Those that did scattered and broke into the roadway just as Setlu hurled himself on them. Many as they fled were speared, some by Setlu's men, some by Nabomba's, but a hundred demoralised fugitives managed to cross the roadway and take refuge in the bush. Amongst them was Ratlali, their captain; so it fell out that both these great fighters escaped the slaughter, and were yet to give further account of themselves before the day was ended.

CHAPTER XXVI

The Dwarf once more shows his mettle and wins new friends; Tetwiza pays the price of treachery, and Hlapeli swallows the last dose of his own medicine; the two captains return again; and the Black Ox is got out of the stream.

THE fight over, Setlu summoned all his men and made count of them. The regiment of Katego was almost broken. Out of the nine hundred men who had set out for the kraal a few hours ago, barely four hundred could muster, and of these more than half were wounded. But the price of victory, though a heavy one, had its compensations. The army of Tetwiza was dispersed and beaten, and there were over a thousand prisoners. These, according to the custom of the country, could have been slain in cold blood, and expected to be. But Setlu was more far-seeing than some of his contemporaries. His policy was the wiser one of taking over and absorbing the survivors among his victims; and, since allegiance was given in those days only to the conqueror or the tyrant, not a few tribes had been materially strengthened by this process.

So Setlu detached a strong guard to take care of the prisoners, ordered the wounded of Katego's regiment to go slowly, and set out with no further ado to kill Tetwiza and take possession of his kraal. As regards Tetwiza, however, it was fated that he should be forestalled.

For when at last that chief looked up from the place where he was waiting, with Napo and his councillors, expecting to see Setlu's cattle driven along the road towards him, his eyes fell on a large body of men approaching, some two hundred marching in front

unarmed, for thus had Setlu disposed the sham drovers so that the advance of his warriors could be screened.

"These must be my drovers returning without the cattle, surely," said the chief to one of his councillors.

They shaded their eyes and looked with puzzled countenances.

"Where, then, can the cattle be?" asked the councillor, not daring to reveal his secret thought that Setlu had refused to send them.

"Mayhap," put in another, "the drovers have turned them to rest and graze."

"Nay," said Tetwiza, looking again narrowly, "these are possibly the people of Sebooba's kraal coming for the wedding feast—in which matter they will be disappointed." And he laughed.

When a chief laughed at one of his own jokes in that country, everybody who heard him do it laughed too. So they all laughed now.

"More likely," said one of the councillors, "they are the people of Tomana, who live yonder to the east, and have struck our road where it joins theirs."

"Yes, it is they!" exclaimed another. "I see men in the ranks with white plumes such as the people of Tomana wear. But these seem many to come from so small a kraal."

To this Napo the Dwarf, who was sitting near by, and knew all, listened attentively. Then, when the discussion was like to be ended by a sudden revelation of the truth, as the advancing regiment was coming nearer, he rattled his spear against the shield he carried, took a pinch of snuff from the reed-box in the lobe of his ear, and said carelessly:

"If these be the people of Tomana, O chief, there is, I think, one amongst them with whom I would have speech, a man that I knew years ago ere he came down to these parts. I will walk forward and see if he is with them."

It seemed in the circumstances the most natural thing for a man to do, and he did it in the most natural way. Or rather, he began to do it. For he was on the point of walking off, without rousing in Tetwiza's breast the least suspicion that everything was not as it should be,

when there came a long, piercing cry from a distant hilltop:

"*Arouse, Tetwiza, else they slay thee!*"

It was the voice of Ratlali!

Every man of Tetwiza's party heard it—heard it and turned, and saw almost in a flash the horror and completeness of their betrayal. Tetwiza most certainly did, though the warning came too late to save him.

For behold, in an instant, Napo the Dwarf, who a moment earlier was snuffing with unconcern for everything in the world, was transformed into a fierce and furious assailant. Moments were precious now, and, with the warning given, and himself surrounded by six stalwart foes, he must use them to some purpose.

Keshwan, advancing with the regiments of Setlu, had heard that shout of warning too, and he, at least, expected something of what followed.

"Look!" he shouted to Setlu, as the advancing column broke into a run. "Yonder the Baboon attacks the Elephants!"—and sure enough, even as he spoke, Napo hurled himself suddenly and furiously on his enemies.

So unexpected was the surprise that two men went down beneath his spear before the remaining four, Tetwiza among them, could make even a pretence at fighting. But a second later Napo found himself the centre of as wild and furious an assault as even he had ever experienced. Trapped and betrayed, Tetwiza and his councillors fought with the desperation of madness, and their blind rage was their undoing. For Napo, keeping a cool head, as was his wont, despite the amazing vigour of his blows, thrust and parried and made play with the great shield such as no man of Setlu's army had ever seen before. The fight was short and bloody. Yet short as it was, all the hundreds of Setlu's soldiers saw it. As if by a common impulse, the advancing regiments suddenly stood still, Keshwan and the chief in front; and thereafter all looked on, silent and fascinated, at the tragedy.

They saw the Dwarf, hemmed in as though to death, hew down at one stroke the man in front of him, catch a spear-thrust glancing upon his shield, and

bury his spear next moment in the body of another assailant.

There were but two left now, Tetwiza and the youngest of his councillors, a stalwart named Pitsi. This man aimed a blow at the Dwarf's head, but Napo caught it upon his shield, and caught it with such cleverness that the spear was dashed out of the man's hand, so that he was left weaponless save for an assegai.

The next incident of the combat was the last of Tetwiza's life. Napo, meeting a rush from that redoubtable warrior, slipped on the bloodstained grass and almost fell. Tetwiza lunged forward, seeking to stab him in the loins, when suddenly out leaped the spear from behind the Dwarf's shield, and the spectators saw Tetwiza throw his arms up and fall backwards, pierced through the chin.

Then they witnessed another of those examples of chivalry on the Dwarf's part which, remarkable as they were, were not unknown even on the savage battlefields of that period. For Napo, opposed now only by the man who had lost his spear, deliberately threw down his own, and plucked from his shield-hand the assegai he carried there.

"Choose now," he said, drawing back a pace. "Fight me on equal terms, I putting my shield aside, since you have none, and discarding my spear, or, if you will, surrender and have your life!"

The man stared, for he had expected death. Then he threw his assegai to the ground and stepped forward unarmed.

"I am Pitsi," he said. "Henceforth, Dwarf, if there be a service within my power, I who was the servant of the greatest of chiefs"—and he looked down at the fallen form of Tetwiza—"am the servant of the greatest fighter!"

"Thus he won me to fight beneath his shield!" exclaimed the Giant; and then, with a great shout of joy, for these wild people loved a good fight, the regiments of Setlu closed about the Dwarf and swept him into their midst with triumph. Only Katego the Wolf, or so it seemed to Baroa, who had joined the

regiments after the fight with Ratlali, and was standing near him, seemed to look sourly and with ill-humour on what had happened.

It was late afternoon when Setlu, at the head of his army, marched into Tetwiza's kraal—or rather rushed into it, with such energy and dash that not even the handful of soldiers left as guard over Maponda could offer the least resistance.

The occupation of the kraal was a short and business-like proceeding. Setlu summoned all the people to the *lekhotla* before the chief's hut. Here he told them what had happened, and how their contemplated treachery towards himself had missed the mark and recoiled upon their own heads. Punishment, however, he had none, save for those who resisted him. Many such had been slain already, including their chief, but all others that desired peace should have it under his own shield. His soldiers would occupy the kraal that night, and on the morrow the inhabitants, and those of Tetwiza's two other kraals, to whom word had been sent already, would collect their belongings and prepare to migrate to his own place, under escort. The next step would be the removal of the huts, all except Tetwiza's, which, according to custom, would be destroyed with its contents. As for the wives, children, and male relatives of Tetwiza, custom ordained that they should be put to the spear, every one. Nevertheless, being strong, he would be merciful, and if these people gave allegiance to him—in which matter he would give them trial as to their conduct and demeanour till the crops were reaped—he would spare them, too.

It was a wise speech, a statesmanlike speech, which Napo in his heart applauded, and to which the people listened in astonishment. But there was one life in that kraal which must pay forfeit, despite Setlu's amazing clemency, and that was the old doctor's. Hlapeli was seized by order of Makani, Setlu's son. Only death could wipe out the insults he had heaped on the women of Setlu at the choosing of the bride, to say nothing of the murder of Poona, the son of Matiwan. So they made old Hlapeli taste some of his own medicine. And to the credit of this wretched creature it must be

recorded that he endured the frightful torments of his own bamboo without a groan!

When night fell guards were posted round about the kraal and over the hut where Maponda was still a prisoner. Then the tired soldiers of Setlu threw themselves down upon their shields and slept. But Napo did not sleep, and it was well he did not. For, suddenly, in the early hours, an alarm was raised; and Napo, rushing to the kraal-gate, there beheld a short, sharp, and bloody encounter in which the fate of Tetwiza's people was finally sealed.

The kraal was attacked truly, but by what a forlorn hope!

For here, coming upon the guards suddenly, a body of not more than two hundred men, ill-armed and some of them exhausted, had hurled themselves in a wild charge with the object of retaking the place! They were led, as Napo was not surprised to see, by the two captains, Sigwa and Ratlali.

Just as he reached the gate, these two, pressing the guard back by the force of their onslaught, leapt in. Some men of Nabomba's regiment, hearing the clamour, rushed forward, and a sharp hand-to-hand fight began in the narrow pathway between the kraal-fence and the huts. The invaders were driven back and escaped into the open, or were slain—all with the exception of the two captains, who fought on like madmen. They stood side by side, with their backs to one of the huts, while at least twenty soldiers made vain endeavours to break the guard of their huge shields and get home a death-thrust. Napo, seeing that defence against such odds was hopeless, called out, "Cease!" and the soldiers fell back laughing—for, with the attackers killed or dispersed, they looked on this incident as something of a diversion. Napo stepped boldly to within a spear's thrust of the two captains.

"Ye are brave men, Sigwa and Ratlali!" he said, in his deep voice, "and methinks there has been overmuch slaughter of brave men this day. If fight ye must, therefore, I take now that claim ye made for the life I saved from Hlapeli, and will give combat to you twain or singly. Yet am I weary of bloodshed, for with

this arm I slew Tetwiza and five with him, and much blood that flowed to-day, though in a good cause, will be put to my account. Hark, therefore! We that have taken this place desire only to have peace. Ye, Sigwa and Ratlali, have shown that ye are men of a high courage in war, and it shall not be accounted disgrace that ye surrender now, and so live to fight many a battle in the days to come. Therefore surrender, and ye shall have life, and captaincy shall be given you in Setlu's regiments, that I promise. Moreover," and his voice dropped somewhat, "methinks I shall soon have need of you, O captains, in a greater adventure. Then, if there be doubt on that subject, we shall see how high is your courage in war!"

The two men listened, and, as with most that came under the hypnotic spell of this strange creature, with his mixture of brute force and chivalry, his unconquerable courage, and his appeals to reason, even amidst the clash of arms—they fell!

"We have chosen, Dwarf!" said Ratlali, as they threw down shields and spears. "But to this we hold you, that in such adventure as that of which ye speak, we three shall be in the forefront, side by side, and there give account of ourselves!"

CHAPTER XXVII

How Setlu's people took a new name; how five hundred girls begged for War and one wanted Love; how the Dwarf made answer, and the Bushman moralised on women; how Keshwan's magic threatened a new danger; and how War and Wizardry were forced to take some heed of Love.

THE defeat of Tetwiza and his five thousand warriors by Setlu and his two thousand revolutionised the fortunes of Setlu and changed the geography of that neighbourhood. It was some weeks, however, before the effects of the change were thoroughly apparent. Napo, Keshwan, and the Bushman, resting at Setlu's kraal, observed the details and gave advice.

Tetwiza's great place, with its hundreds of huts, disappeared. His two smaller kraals disappeared also, and for days processions could be seen marching under guard of Setlu's soldiers towards the Place of the Ox. For thus was Setlu's stronghold now called, and his tribe was Makhomo, "the People of the Ox," because the cattle had played so prominent a part in securing the victory. So the Ox became the *seboko*, or emblem of the tribe. On all future occasions, for ever after, when these people praised their chief and boasted about themselves, he was the Bull that Thundered, his wives were the Cows that Bellowed (which they often did), and his soldiers were the Calves that Ran. The heads of the chief and of his bodyguard were decorated on ceremonial occasions with a pair of bullocks' horns each, bleached white; and these, with high nodding plumes of black feathers, gave this regiment the terrifying appearance and enviable reputation of being devils, which reputation stood them in good stead on a future occasion, as will be seen.

Within three days of the overthrow of Tetwiza the small tribes from miles around began sending messages of submission to Setlu. First of these were the peoples of Tomana and Sebooba, and they were followed by a long string of important nobodies. Each deputation brought along a *hoboko*, or official praiser, to extol the virtues of the victor. Setlu was accordingly in the enviable position, which never falls to the lot of a white man, of being able to hear his praises sung publicly for three or four hours on end every day for a fortnight. Before the first week was over he began to think he really was a personage of some consequence in the neighbourhood. At the end of the second week he was convinced there were few people in the universe who could give him points.

The praising of a chief by somebody officially appointed for the purpose is an old custom still followed among the African savages. It is a good custom, too; one of the best they have. It allows an important personage to become puffed up and conceited and thoroughly satisfied with himself all the time, without putting everybody else under the strain of making him so. It is a tonic, a balm, a soothing syrup. When the praiser opens the floodgates of his flapdoodle and souses a great man in a river of bosh ten feet deep, and everybody sits by giving consent to the justice thereof, that man is healed of his hurts and soreness, and the world is a summer-place for him. Let him be depressed with a bad cold or the toothache: the praiser appears and tells him, in seventy-five stanzas of unadulterated falsehood, that he has caused more human misery and sudden death than any other monster in the world—and proves it and gives the instances—and behold, what is toothache to a man who goes about the earth like a blighting pestilence? Let him be crossed in love: the praiser arrives and informs him, in a psalm of two hundred and forty verses, that there is not a female on the face of the whole earth who could permanently withstand a man so utterly terrifying and comprehensively wicked; and lo, his love-sickness vanishes and he is complacently self-satisfied again. And if by any chance he does a notable deed and should in some spasm

of temporary forgetfulness omit to talk about it, there is the praiser to remind him and everybody else, and to embroider that deed with fringes of perfection and tassels of nobility so wide and ample that you could cover a nation with it, let alone an individual.

There certainly ought to be praisers among the civilised white people, to be hired on reasonable terms. They would make life easier and more pleasant, and would give a zest to even the most humdrum existence. Politicians would not need them, because they know how to recite their own virtues; but how grateful they would be to many a hard-hit soldier in the battle of life who gets all the kicks and none of the half-pence! The writer of this history, for one such, would engage a praiser right off, and fetch him out and put him into full blast with all his bellows going; and then the newspaper criticisms would fall harmless.

During those two or three weeks Setlu and his councillors, assisted by the Dwarf, the Giant, and the Bushman, and generally advised by 'Tshola, the witch doctor of the kraal, attended to matters of state importance. Napo, for reasons of his own, wanted Setlu established firmly in his territory, and he lost no time about it. Indeed, so urgently did he regard the matter that he got the ceremonies usually attendant on a great victory postponed, lest anything should interfere with the progress of events. One of his first steps was to induce Setlu to dispatch an embassy to Letchla, seeking alliance with the People of the Brand. This duty was assigned to Keshwan, who, when he had recovered of his wounds, left with an escort of two hundred soldiers under Nabomba, and a gift of twenty head of cattle. Keshwan was away the best part of a fortnight, a period, as will be seen, fraught with misfortune for the travellers.

The next step taken by Napo was to reorganise Setlu's army. This was a task for which he was well adapted by genius and training, and, as Setlu gave him practically a free hand, he made a prime success of it. True to his promise to the two captains of Tetwiza, he secured for them each the captaincy of a regiment; and this act was looked upon as both just and mollifying to the defeated prisoners. When they heard of it, practically

every one of Tetwiza's fugitives who had fled from the fighting came out of hiding and asked to be enrolled. But Napo took care to mix them with the regiments, so that there should be no large body of Tetwiza's men capable of acting in concert should treachery arise.

On Qedini's "regiment of girls," when Keshwan had told him that story of the ambush, Napo bestowed particular attention. It was made to consist, in addition to those whose defeat gave the regiment its name, of youths who had never fought before. He knew that from this fact and the stigma under which the regiment rested it would give a good account of itself when the need arose; and, indeed, from the very day of its first appearance at the review held by the chief, it never ceased imploring a chance to go out and do battle somewhere. Napo expected great things of these men. He ordered that each should wear a brass bangle on his left arm and a necklet of coloured seeds, these being items in the feminine finery of the day. The officers were to be known according to rank by the number of their bangles and necklets. He gave orders that until this regiment had fought and lost (if lose it did) no taunt was ever to be thrown at it because of the name it bore. To crown all, he invented a special form of salute, which was to be given by it on all ceremonial occasions. Instead of raising the spear or the assegai in the right hand, it was to use the left, and no other regiment was to encroach on this privilege; except that every officer, and even the chief himself, when he saluted this regiment, was to use the left hand.

In all this Napo exhibited the discriminating genius which is peculiar to great generals. For the upshot of so many special distinctions was that, even before the regiment went out to fight, it became proud of itself and never lacked recruits. Young men from the smaller surrounding tribes joined it as auxiliaries; and in a few weeks' time Qedini's Girls numbered a full five hundred, all bursting to get to grips with someone! And then to cap everything, when the last enrolment had taken place, Setlu reviewed the regiment, and before all men issued the order that no more than five hundred were ever to join it, thereby giving it an entirely exclusive

standing. The Girls, when they had heard this, sent up a roar of cheering that would have startled a young ladies' seminary.

When the affairs of the army were in a fair way of settlement, Napo turned his attention to the defences of the place, to the enlargement of the kraal, to the establishment of military enclosures where the soldiers could undergo rigorous training, and to the better defence and pasturage of the cattle.

All this took many weeks to accomplish, and Napo did not see the finish of it. But when it was done, the stronghold of the Bull that Thundered was as nearly impregnable to assault as skill, energy, and forethought could make it.

"Only the hosts of Chaka could take this place," said Setlu, complacently viewing the work.

"Not even they," said Katego the Wolf; and without knowing it, he spoke a prophecy.

So preoccupied was the Dwarf with all these concerns, in which his advice was sought and his word often regarded as a decisive vote against all the councillors, that he did not notice the development of a comedy of which he was himself the central figure, and which ere long was destined to take a tragic turn.

Baroa it was who first saw what was afoot, and for a time he kept his own counsel. But one evening, as he and the Dwarf sat together after sundown in their hut —for the travellers would not be separated, but were together in everything—there appeared the figure of a female, bearing a gourd of milk and some stewed goat's flesh. The custom of the people was that the men and women ate separately, being served either in their huts or in the *lekhotla*, a general enclosure where boys waited on them. Here they would sit around the platters of food, picking the morsels out with their fingers, and enjoying themselves with disputes and scandals, generally the latter. The chief and some of the more important men ate in their huts, and to them women brought the food, leaving it at the doors and retiring immediately. On this particular evening, however, the bearer of the food did not retire as quickly as she should have done. Indeed, she lingered there for a purpose, and that was to

catch the Dwarf's eye. When he looked up, therefore, his glance fell on the face of that very girl whom he had saved from the savageries of old Hlapeli, the doctor of Tetwiza's kraal.

Judged by the standards of the European reader, Letika was not exactly a Venus or a Cleopatra. But according to the ideas of her own people she was a girl of great beauty. In fact, she was the belle of the kraal. She was worth, at a low estimate, twenty head of cattle to her father, who would not have sold her in marriage for a horn less. And, such is the ideal of loveliness that ravishes the savage bosom, this young lady had suitors in plenty and for every suitor ten jealous enemies of her own sex. By the latter it was said that the man who got Letika would get more than he expected; for she was generally reported to be proud, masterful, and ambitious.

When Napo looked up and saw the girl lingering by the hut door, a smile came over her face and her eyes drooped.

"Thy servant would have speech with thee," she said, in a low voice.

"Speak, then," said Napo, not paying any great attention, for he was busied with his thoughts, and till that moment had almost forgotten the girl. "But how come you to bring our food now for the first time?"

"Nay," she said, quickly, "each day at sundown I have brought it, but ye took no notice of me and looked past."

"It is true," said Baroa. "I have seen her."

"Then for that discourtesy give pardon," said the Dwarf. "Though in truth I have no eyes for women and girls."

"Yet a heart for them must thou have, Dwarf," said the girl, a shade annoyed. "Else thou wouldst have let that beast and murderer of Tetwiza's slay me. It is of that I would speak now."

"There is little enough to say," said the Dwarf, uneasily.

"There is this much," and Letika raised her head and looked him boldly in the eyes: "But for thee, Dwarf,

I would be food for worms now, and I give thanks. Henceforth I am thy handmaid and thy servant."

With that she turned and went.

"That girl loves you, Dwarf," said the Bushman, with a grunt. "I have watched her for many days. I have seen her follow you with her eyes as a dog looks at its master. She sought permission to carry the food here daily because she loves you."

"And what of it?" snapped out the Dwarf. "Am I at fault if one fool loves what a thousand women have laughed at? Look at this body, and these arms, and this head. Is it blame to me, with such weapons against the love of women, that one should live who desires to take me under the guard of my ugliness and conquer me? Nay, Bushman," he added, with a bitter laugh: "mistake not that this poor girl loves where never woman has loved or caressed, or ever will! Thankful she may be because—perhaps in an ill moment, who knows?—I gave her life. But *love!*" and he spat contemptuously. "Let there be no talk of such folly, Bushman!"

Baroa heard this outburst with astonishment. He had never seen the Dwarf in this mood, and wondered what could be behind it. Perhaps some disappointment in love; whereat the Bushman laughed to himself, wondering why so many men made fools of themselves over women. *He* never did. All women were alike to him; good enough playthings, if not too spiteful, but best avoided if they meant their affections to be taken seriously. Quala, a woman of his own race, had taught him that lesson years ago, and perhaps someone had taught it to the Dwarf, too. Yet it might be well if the Dwarf paid some heed to the blandishments of this Letika. Doubtless she had the claws of a tiger-cat, since all women know how to scratch as well as fondle. He, Baroa, knew this well, not having studied the sex for nothing.

He was eating too fast to talk, so he ruminated thus till the meal was finished. Then he asked suddenly:

"Dwarf, how long do we sojourn at this kraal?"

"There are plans in the making," said Napo. "Mayhap for two moons, perchance longer."

"Methinks," said the Bushman, reflectively, "there are some here that would rejoice to see our backs as we go. I have listened sometimes while you talked with the councillors, though not often; for two there are who have kept watch on me, and on you also!"

"For what purpose, and who are they?" asked Napo, in surprise.

"The purpose we shall know doubtless in good time. There is Katego, who has no goodwill for any of us, of that I am certain; and Tshola, the kraal doctor, who was greater before we came. Tales of the magic of Keshwan are noised about the whole place, and Tshola is angered at them."

"This accursed magic of Keshwan's will be the ruin of us," said Napo, impatiently. "His wizardry is of such kind that whatever he achieves by it is no sooner done than a cloud of misfortune comes on us!"

"Yet some of the people are saying now," went on the Bushman, "that Dabazooki, having superior powers, should be made doctor of this kraal."

"Whereupon," said Napo, with conviction, "every devil of the air shall descend upon it, and there shall be such plagues and pestilence as no wizard in the world has yet encountered! They will be wise to let Keshwan go and hold by Tshola."

"So many of them say, Dwarf, claiming that before so great a matter is settled it should be put to the proof."

"Which will give Keshwan a chance to show the efficacy of his bubble-blower," said the Dwarf.

"Of a truth, yea, if the bubble-blower has qualities for the drawing down of the lightning, since it is in this that Tshola excels above all wizards in the land."

"Then, if it has," said Napo, "better that Keshwan give the bubble-blower to Tshola, and let him suck down the lightning into his own vitals, and so destroy him! As for me, I know little of these things, save that the fooleries of the wizards curse the land everywhere!"

"It is so," assented Baroa, who was as superstitious as most bushmen. But if there were such persons as free-thinkers in those days, Napo might almost have led the sect. The power of the witch-doctor was greater than that of the chiefs themselves, just as in more enlightened

times the power of the priesthood has been supreme in some countries and very considerable in all. The wizards, as Napo well knew, were generally speaking humbugs and cheats, and their play on the credulity of the people was seldom turned to any but the worst account. Their arts of prophecy and divination were the channels for revenge, private spites, greed, jealousy, and every abomination, including murder. Such was his knowledge of the brotherhood that Napo sometimes wished the people would rise up out of their age-old ignorance and wipe them out to a wizard. As for Keshwan, and the wisdom he was alleged to have imbibed from the teachings of Kwokwa, Napo laughed that celebrated magician to scorn; and wished very sincerely that Keshwan had stuck to the trade of soldiering and left magic alone.

"If all this be true that you tell me," said the Dwarf, gloomily, "mayhap our plans for the future must be shaped more by wizardry than by war."

"And perchance by love, too," said the Bushman, mysteriously. "Have a care for that girl, Dwarf. Spurn her and she may be a ready weapon for some to use against us!"

"They that grow great in the shadow of a king need the most protection," said the Dwarf, quoting a saying that is as true of civilised mankind to-day as it was of savage humanity a century ago.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Gives account of a great dealer in thunderbolts; shows how even the best wizards sometimes cross each other; reveals a trap that was set for the three travellers; and proves that Maponda knew how to hold his tongue.

WHEN Napo sat at the council next morning, he took particular note of the demeanour of the councillors towards himself, and especially that of Tshola the wizard. As regards the majority, he was disposed almost to put down to the mere gossip of the kraal what Baroa had told him. Katego, for instance, his wolfish mouth smiling with as much pleasantness as could be expected of it under the most favourable circumstances, went out of his way to be agreeable, and deferred to everything that Napo said. He even elaborated some of Napo's suggestions for the improvement of the defences, or, when he had any of his own to offer, submitted them as much to Napo as to the chief himself. There were *wows* of approval from the other councillors, and an air of great cordiality prevailed, until just before the rising of the council. Then things took a turn for which, fortunately, Baroa's conversation had somewhat prepared the Dwarf.

It was Tshola the witch-doctor who changed the course of affairs, and brought into the serene atmosphere of that gathering a flash of his own lightning.

This man was a distinguished magician, who kept a private stock of lightning in a ratskin bag he carried about his neck. He would go out on the veld alone on a hot day and fetch a thunderstorm by means of his special incantations. Then, when the right moment came, he would open his bag and let loose his lightning and shiver a tree to atoms with it. He always did this

when he was alone. But the people would be brought out to that spot afterwards to see the tree and marvel at the devastating powers of this magician.

Sometimes a bullock or a goat would get in the way of Tshola's lightning, and from the resulting business there would be much profit for the wizard; because all the people who had cattle would pay handsomely to be protected from the terrors of the ratskin bag. Even then, some of those that had paid lost their cattle; but that, of course, was the work of a rival wizard thousands of miles away, who was jealous of Tshola's powers, and occasionally got in despicable little thrusts at him in that way.

Tshola had a considerable reputation in his part of the country. The things he did with lightning aroused the admiration of even the best wizards of the adjacent tribes. For instance, a man would arrive at the kraal after a journey of a hundred miles, and mention casually that on such and such a day the lightning struck a cow at a certain spot. Tshola would exhibit surprise at this—mild surprise bordering on incredulity. A cow? Was he quite certain it was a cow? Yes, he was sure; had seen it, and handled the carcase, and eaten some of the flesh. Well, well, perhaps so. In these small experiments the details were sometimes liable to go wrong. At the same time he (Tshola) was sorry about that cow, and would send one of his own to the owner. He had intended merely to kill a dog—there were a good many dogs in that region, and one more or less would not be missed by anybody. It was all part of a little test he was making at the time to try the strength of a new thunderbolt, and he was afraid he had not taken sufficient care over the matter. Whereupon he would send a cow all that distance to replace the one that was killed, and this act of dazzling generosity would not only prove conclusively the truth of what he said, but would send his reputation up a long way in the neighbourhood.

Or perhaps a visitor from another tribe would report that a hut was struck by lightning and six men killed. Tshola would knit his brows at this, and grit his teeth, and look puzzled.

"Six men, six men," he would repeat over and over,

counting them off on his fingers. "Nay, there must be a mistake there. Think you well as to the number."

"Of a verity there were six killed, O wizard."

Tshola would bite his lips now, and draw a ring on the sand with his great toe. He would get up and walk round that ring four times, and spit into the middle of it. Then he would lie down and listen intently with his ear on the ground. Then he would lift up his head suddenly with a laugh, as though he saw through the mystery at last, and say:

"Perchance there were others killed in another hut near by?"

"Nay, wizard, no others were killed, and that I know, for I left many days after. These six and no more."

Then Tshola would utter suddenly a loud and comprehensive curse, and he would jump up and grab hold of that traveller, and shake him by the ear, and waggle his bag of lightning under the man's nose.

"Go back, son of a dog, whence you came, and tell your people that, unless their wickedness is mended, and they send tribute of seven beasts to this kraal, I shall let loose again this lightning and slay *the other fourteen* who should have been licked up by that stroke only my hand trembled, and it was not swift enough! Go, you jackal of the fields, and make haste, else will I blast you with my fires on the way!"

That traveller would get out surprised and thankful to have a whole skin; but not so thankful as his tribe when they found they could buy off the other fourteen casualties with only seven head of cattle.

It was little things like these that built up the reputations of the really accomplished wizards in those days—and does so still. Tshola's speciality was lightning. He had practically "cornered" all the lightning in that kingdom, and had grown rich on the commodity. Other wizards near by specialised in cattle-sickness, or the smallpox, or death by drowning, and carried samples of these disasters about in their ratskin pouches. But none of them had made the success that he had, because their specialities were less spectacular. There was also another bag in which he kept a few samples of hailstorms, which he used sometimes by way of amusement.

On one occasion a stranger coming up the valley was overtaken by one of Tshola's hailstorms and stricken down dead. Tshola admitted afterwards he had done this, because this man had said in company that a wizard who could not deal in more than one thing would be thought nothing of at *his* kraal. So Tshola proved that he could deal in two highly destructive elements when he liked; and sent the relatives five head of cattle and two goats with his compliments. His reputation as a hailmaker went soaring around the countryside.

The council seemed to be drawing to an end, when, at a private signal from Katego, Tshola addressed himself to the chief, saying:

"About that matter, O chief, of which thou gavest promise to speak with the Dwarf here."

Setlu looked round a trifle uneasily.

"It is this, Dwarf," he said, shuffling his feet. "Some of these my councillors, being smitten with great wonder at the marvels reported of the wizard Dabazooki, have petitioned me on the subject."

"I also have petitioned thee," put in Tshola.

"True. Be it said to the credit of this our wizard that he first made the request," said Setlu. "Namely, that this Dabazooki shall give sign of his great magic, so that a dispute may be settled," and he looked vexed and puzzled.

"Dabazooki is more a warrior than a wizard," said Napo apprehensively.

"I know that he is a warrior of great daring," said Setlu, "and these my councillors give thanks that he fought with us to overthrow Tetwiza. Nevertheless, both in Tetwiza's kraal yonder, and at the kraal of Letchla before Vokwana was overthrown, he gave signs of magic which have been noised abroad. This coming to the ears of my councillors and of all the people, it is held that with two wizards of renown in the same kraal there may arise calamities from the conflict of their wizardry, whereby this kraal might be swept with a pestilence or otherwise destroyed."

"Such thing has happened to my knowledge," said Katego. And Tshola made haste to add: "It were impossible to avoid a mischance which might cost many

lives, were hostile wizardries to interfere with each other."

"Then surely," said the Dwarf, "that shall be settled now, for I make oath on the behalf of Dabazooki that, so long as he sojourns here, no magic shall be practised by him."

"Nay, you misheed," said Tshola quickly. "Not in the practice, but in the mind, of the magician is there a contrary and evil influence, the which no wizard of understanding shall gainsay."

"Wherefore," said Katego, "certain of us have petitioned that a trial of magic shall be made between the two wizards."

"And the reason is this," said Setlu; "that whereas aforetime the wizardry of Tshola was supreme, it now fails him, on his own showing, since the coming into these parts of a rival magician."

"Which I can prove," said Tshola, "by this fact, that when I endeavoured to make a magic against Tetwiza some days before he was overthrown, in the hope of killing him by a sickness as soon as the marriage was over, and so raising Setlu's son to the chieftainship of Tetwiza's people, I was seized with a palsy and could do nothing. This, it has since been revealed to me, was by reason of the approach, though he was yet afar off, of this Dabazooki, whose magical properties acted upon mine, to the paralysis and destruction thereof."

"Then," said Napo, "if it be as you state, let Dabazooki do all the magic while he is here and Tshola resume once more when he is gone."

"Nay," persisted Tshola, "ye misheed again, Dwarf, being ill versed in these matters. For know that by the presence of Dabazooki and the malign influence of his formulas my magical powers will diminish and perchance perish away. Then, when Dabazooki goes hence, as we are told he goes some day, and you with him, the kraal will be without a wizard of the first rank, and misfortune will overtake it."

"Wherefore," put in Katego, again, "we pray O chief that thou orderest a trial between these wizards, since already there is evil afoot. For," he added, darkly,

"it is now being said by the common people that this victory of thine over Tetwiza was due not to thy bravery, O chief, or to the cunning of any man," and his eye fell on Napo, "but to the magic of this wanderer. Is it meet that the people should hold thee in such poor esteem, O Setlu, and that the wizard of thine own kraal should be accounted as nothing in the matter?"

Some of the councillors murmured their approval of this speech, and Tshola, feeling that his case had been well put, waited complacently for the reply. Setlu, however, seemed reluctant to give it. The truth was, he knew as well as Napo did that the whole thing was a mere pretext for embroiling his new friends in a quarrel which would bode ill for them, and would perhaps drive them from the kraal.

He did not want this—for a time, at least. There was much to be done yet in which both Dwarf and Giant could give him valuable assistance if they were treated well. Besides which, he was under an obligation to them, as he realised to the full. Yet he knew if he held out against Tshola and his powerful supporters, Katego included, there would be trouble of another sort, and this he was not anxious to face.

Nevertheless, an answer of some sort must be given.

"There shall be a trial between them, as ye wish," he said, after a long pause. Then, just in time to freeze up the smiles that were dawning on the faces of Katego and the wizard, he added: "Provided that this man Dabazooki, who is the guest of my kraal, consents to it. As to the date and the manner of the trial, I shall give my command when Dabazooki has spoken."

With that Tshola and the others had to be content, and soon afterwards the council dispersed.

Napo went back to the hut, where he found Baroa awaiting him.

"What now?" he asked, sharply; for he saw by the Bushman's demeanour that he had something fresh to tell.

"This, Dwarf. Maponda has sent word desiring to have speech with you."

Napo had had no communication at all with Maponda the Owl since the latter was placed under arrest at

Tetwiza's kraal. Nevertheless, he had expected this message. By Setlu's orders the prisoner had been kept under close guard in a hut set apart for the purpose; and this, too, was a cause for murmuring amongst the councillors. They knew, long before Napo appeared on the scene, of the influence of Maponda at Tetwiza's kraal, and his share in the intended treachery was obvious. Several of them, therefore, demanded that he should be tried by the council or put to death forthwith. In this they were supported by Makani, the chief's son. Napo, however, had good and sufficient reasons for preserving Maponda's life until he had ascertained all that it was possible to learn of Sekonyela's whereabouts. The mere fact of his presence in the district convinced Napo that Sekonyela was not far away—but where, and with what force at his command, were things he did not know.

As it fell out, Napo was to learn little from his interview with Maponda. That ill-conditioned personage, smiling at his own craftiness, professed his readiness to speak of anything. When it came to Sekonyela, he shut his lips like an oyster.

"Still," said Napo, at the end of a fruitless interview, "of Sekonyela you shall speak shortly, else shall you suffer the death from which I find it hard even now to restrain these wolves of Setlu."

"Of that I have heard whispers," said Maponda, his red lips still smiling. "But know, Dwarf, that the blade which stabs my heart has two edges, one for me and one for my enemies. Let those using it be careful."

"And mayhap," said Napo, reflectively, "since that other edge is named Sekonyela, it would be well to invoke it now. Then would I know where the man is that I could measure him."

Maponda laughed outright.

"If Sekonyela comes hither to avenge my blood, he will bring with him so many as will stamp this kraal flat and leave not a living creature in it!" He spat on the floor, and stamped out the mark with a twist of his foot to show how complete a job Sekonyela would make of it. "Go now, Dwarf. I asked speech with you

because it seemed fitting after so long a silence, and if terms can be made for my release I would strike a bargain with you or with Setlu. But if my life is to hang thus on the betrayal of Sekonyela, let us speak now our last on the subject."

"So be it," said the Dwarf, and left the hut without another word.

CHAPTER XXIX

In which Napo the Dwarf takes lessons in love-making, but learns little; Letika takes lessons in the manner of a man's wooing, and learns much; and Baroa the Bushman is liberal with advice, warnings and instructions all round.

As a matter of fact, Napo did not again need to visit Maponda, for the crafty Bushman devised another plan. When the Dwarf returned to the hut and told Baroa what had passed, and of the trial of magic that the chief had ordered, the Bushman fell into thought for a few moments.

"Keshwan will have need of all his arts," he said presently. "Better, mayhap, if we continue our journey before this maker of thunderbolts gets out his bag and blasts us."

"This accursed magic of the Giant's brings us eternally to trouble," said the Dwarf, complainingly. "Yet if we leave this kraal before Maponda talks we may journey to small purpose after all."

"Wherefore it will be well to make Maponda talk," said the Bushman; "and as to that, Dwarf, I have a plan. This girl Letika, that loves thee for thy handsome face and the beauty of thy form, might perchance wheedle from Maponda by the arts of a woman what ye could not get from him with a spear. Moreover, in this matter two hares might be killed with the throw of one stick."

"The first hare being Maponda," suggested the Dwarf.

"And the second Letika herself," added Baroa. "For I am certain, Dwarf, unless that hare is killed and cooked—in other words, taken into your hut—it will grow fangs like a snake and bite the three of us. It is spoken of in the whole kraal that she loves you."

"And it is spoken of in this hut oftener than I wish to hear it!" said Napo, harshly. "I have no thought for marriages and love-makings!"

"Nevertheless," persisted the Bushman, "it might serve us all to good purpose if you made pretence otherwise. For if you heeded this little bird's song, and she but sang the same to that Owl yonder in his hut, we might be the sooner gone on our journey to meet your Golden Glory."

The Bushman said no more at the moment; for just then Letika herself appeared, bearing their food. The Dwarf looked at her intently, but with no very friendly eye. The mysterious hints and suggestions of the Bushman seemed to be unpleasantly realised to his mind already in the swift, graceful, and silent movements of the girl, like a young panther stealing about a kraal-gate at night. She did not remain long; and Napo, who, truth to tell, was distrustful of all women save one, and had no notion how a man might profit by their wiles, was not sorry to see her go. Nevertheless, he turned over in his mind the Bushman's words, and determined at the least to see whether anything might possibly come of the idea.

Next day, when Letika appeared at the hut door, the Dwarf greeted her with an ambiguous smile. It was intended to suggest to her mind a consciousness of dawning love, though it seemed to the watching Bushman more like a grin of approval at the stewed goat's flesh and mealies which constituted their mid-day meal. However, the maiden was less discerning, for she replied with downcast eyes which spoke more than words.

"There are comely women in this kraal," began Napo, gulping.

"If it please thee to say so," said Letika, bashfully.

"As comely as the women of my own race, but not so well-proportioned, being a shade too fat," pursued the Dwarf.

"Fool!" whispered Baroa, giving him a kick.

"Only the old women in this kraal are fat," said Letika.

"Nay, some of the girls also. I have seen and noted it," persisted Napo. "But their cheeks, nevertheless,

are somewhat high-boned and thereby lacking in the required fullness."

"Tell her," whispered Baroa, hoarsely, "that she is as fat and ugly as a cow on soft pasturage. That will please her."

"Nay," said the Dwarf, blandly. "I say not that you are fat and ugly as an overfed cow, such being far from my thought. But methinks there is less virtue in heavy flesh on the young than in a thin, graceful, and agile form, well-poised in standing and of a slender habit when sitting down. Among our people——"

Here the indignant Letika observed coldly:

"Mayhap, Dwarf, you can produce some of these renowned beauties, upon whom we coarse and ill-looking cows may model ourselves for your liking?"

"Alas, nay," was the fatal reply; "for I am alone in these parts, else would I gladly show you how true it is, as I contend, that no such beauty dwells in any other living women!"

"Then get you out of this kraal and back to where these lovely women await you!" exclaimed Letika, furiously; and with that she bounced up in a rage and disappeared, leaving Napo bewildered and the Bushman almost speechless with indignation.

"If thus you make love to women," he blurted out, "better to hate them outright and tell them so!"

Napo scratched his head and looked puzzled.

"The girl is assuredly a she-tiger," he said, "for never have I seen a woman enraged for so little cause. What said I, Bushman, save that the women of my race are more beautiful than these of Setlu? That I so well know, as a proved fact, that it is matter incapable of dispute. Why should this girl be enraged because of a statement so true and well founded?"

"Nevertheless," said Baroa, "had you but the wit of a he-goat or a monkey, you would have known that before a woman is pleased by a man she must be made to see herself standing above all others in his sight."

"And be thereby grievously and falsely deceived by him?" asked Napo.

"Of a surety. Such falsehood and deception a woman forgives in any man. If you would be loved by women,

tell them only what they would fain think of themselves, though there be no darker lie in the whole universe. If you would that they hated you, tell them just what your eyes see. Be false, and they love! Be true, and they hate bitterly!"

Napo scratched his chin in perplexity.

"No doubt there is wisdom in what you say, Bushman, though I am ill-versed in women's ways. This love-making should be given over to you, I being unfitted for it."

"If it were given to *me* to make love to this girl," said Baroa, scornfully, "I should so praise and belaud her that, had she the face of a crocodile, ere she left me she would suppose that no woman in the whole world was gifted with such loveliness as hers, and no man with such wisdom as mine. The man who speaks truth to a woman, Dwarf, though he be wise as the hills, is henceforth more fool than the beasts of the field."

With that, Baroa, thoroughly disgusted, got up and went away. But he did not go very far, for as it chanced he espied Letika herself at a little distance. Being firmly convinced of the necessity for using this damsel in the prosecution of their schemes, as well as for the more important purpose of saving their own skins, Baroa thought he would mend matters and put the Dwarf's peculiar addresses on a different footing. So he went up to Letika and said untruthfully:

"I am sent by Napo the Dwarf to inquire why you left in such manner but now, as though angered at an insult?"

The girl turned a glowering look on him.

"Tell the Dwarf, then, that I left his presence because it was not seemly that one of Setlu's overfed cows, being a shade too fat, and high-boned about the cheeks, and wanting in slender habit, should any longer offend the eyes of one accustomed to the graces of his own beautiful women."

"Nay," said the Bushman, consolingly, "you misheed the Dwarf, having no knowledge of the special customs and observances of his country, as he has no knowledge of yours. In that country whence the Dwarf comes, when a man looks with the eyes of love his

speech becomes rough. Only when he looks with the eyes of hate are his words smooth."

"Then it were a better country for wars than love-making," sniffed Letika.

"Of a surety it is," said the Bushman, glibly; "from which fact arises this very custom, which is thoroughly understood by the women there. If a man in that country loves a girl he brings her no soft speeches of any sort, but bites her with his tongue, calls her fat, ugly, and bearing the likeness of a cow—or mayhap of a crocodile, or of other beasts. And the more insultingly are his words contrived against her, the more surely does she perceive that he loves her."

"A strange country," said Letika, scornfully.

"It has many strange customs," said the Bushman, suddenly smitten with an idea. "As for instance this: that when a man loves a girl he puts himself to the test of endurance straightway by commanding that girl, under penalties, to make love forthwith to some other man of his choosing, and an enemy of his. During this love-making neither he nor that girl may utter so much as a word of love one to the other."

"If this be the manner of these people in love-making," said Letika, "what manner are they when they hate?"

"Ah, then," exclaimed the Bushman, "you would hear endearments and soft words in plenty, such as you of this land hear in love; it being the strange and peculiar custom of the Dwarf's country that no words are uttered, in love or hate, but bear an exactly contrary interpretation to what they appear to mean."

"Wherefore," said the damsel, still somewhat sceptical, but inclined to be mollified by this unexpected explanation, "when a man of that country desires to show his love, he greets a woman upon all occasions with the most rude utterances?"

"Only before marriage," said the Bushman, diplomatically.

"And if he by any chance spoke fair, with endearments, as one does that loves in this land, then she would know that in truth he hated her?"

"Of a surety!" said the Bushman, resolving to prime

the Dwarf in these newly invented customs with the least possible delay.

"I will come again with the food at sundown," said Letika. "This custom of the Dwarf's is new to me, and I would see into the matter further."

In a high state of elation the Bushman set off to find the Dwarf and to impart to him the good news that no further love-making would be necessary, but on the contrary he was now under a positive obligation to be as disagreeable as he could. Further than that, he would now be able to command the girl as a matter of course to worm out of Maponda by the arts of her sex the secret he was so anxious to possess.

But Napo had left the hut, and was nowhere to be found. The Bushman searched round and about, and went some distance from the kraal on a false scent. When at length he returned it was past meal-time; and there, sure enough, was the Dwarf, alone in the hut, and wearing a puzzled look and an air of general dissatisfaction.

"That she-tiger has been again!" he said, as the Bushman entered. "Verily these women are mysteries past my fathoming."

"What befell this time?" asked Baroa, fearing the worst.

"This befell," said the Dwarf, gloomily. "No sooner did the girl present herself than I, remembering your counsel as to a man's dealings with women, began most exceedingly to praise her——"

"You praised her?" repeated the Bushman, feebly.

"Of a truth I did, and spake more lies and blacker ones than ever before issued from my mouth! I told her she was so comely as to face and figure that I had no thought but of her by day, and dreamed of nothing else by night."

"And what said she to that lie?"

"She looked sore puzzled at these words, Baroa. Wherefore, bearing in mind what you said to me, I told her her eyes were of such beauty as might well ravish the mind of a strong man and bring him to folly; that her face was such as had sent many a nation into grievous and bloody wars; that her form was lithe and graceful

as the reeds by the riverside, and her step so soft that it fell like a shadow. All which, Baroa, I had by forethought prepared against the coming of this wretched woman, and shall defy you to better as a soft speech for a woman's ears!"

"Fool!" exclaimed Baroa. "You could not have said worse!"

"What!" shouted Napo. "Did you not with your own lips tell me this thing must be done, and such hideous lies and false statements be uttered, else would a woman hate me!"

"And hath this one shown on the hearing of them that she loves you?" asked the Bushman, with a groan.

"Nay," said the Dwarf, warmly; "and here is what sore puzzles me, and makes this riddle of women beyond my solving. No sooner had I uttered these soft speeches, than she turned on me like a snake spitting venom, and left me without a word!"

"And I wonder not that she did so!" said Baroa sourly. "For a surety thy love-making, Dwarf, is of a sort to frighten crows!"

"Then if it be that a man dare not speak the truth and must not speak lies, let him be dumb as a dead dog!" shouted Napo. "And as for this waddling, smirking girl, with her wild-cat tempers, let her be meat for jackals before ever I am the fool for her scorn again!"

Baroa the Bushman had to explain the situation five or six times before the indignant Dwarf could be brought to see reason. But after a long and heated argument, he gave in, on a condition. Baroa was to seek out the girl again, and explain that it was another custom of Napo's country, which he had forgotten to mention, that after the first essay at love-making the contrary tactics were indulged in as a trial of the maiden's love. After which there was never the least remission of hard words from the ardent lover. This the Bushman did early next morning; adding, to the great bewilderment of Letika, that so deeply did the Dwarf burn with his passion for that lovely damsel, he had lain awake groaning the whole night, and was at that moment incapable of eating his food!

CHAPTER XXX

Keshwan the Giant promises to give tuition in the art of thunderbolts; Katego the Wolf smiles in consequence; Baroa the Bushman speaks his mind; and Napo the Dwarf embarks on a strange wooing.

IT was a day or two after this incident that Keshwan returned from his mission to the People of the Brand. The chief and the councillors received him, and the gift of cattle he had brought from Letchla, and heard his report. Letchla was anxious for the alliance, regarding which Keshwan made a long and vainglorious speech which put both Napo and the Bushman on tenterhooks because of its frequent references to the part played by his own wizardries in bringing this desirable consummation to a head. It was, in fact, his strange and persistent delusion, when there was no fighting to be done, that he was a great wizard; whereas at the first glisten of a spear, wizardry could look after itself for all he cared, provided he got a full share of the slaughter. So he rambled on, almost forgetting Letchla; and all the while the vanity of this harmless fraud was getting him deeper and deeper into the mire with Tshola and the councillors, though he never saw it.

"Thanks to my father's spirit, it is ended!" said Napo, when, after a long time, Keshwan sat down. "Now Setlu speaks."

But Setlu, being a man of few words, said little.

"You have done well on this errand, Giant," he said. "I give thanks, and you shall have due reward. Later, when we have discussed this matter in the council, you shall go back to Letchla with my word and shall make arrangements for the alliance."

"That were well, O Bull that Thunders," said Kesh-

wan, "for apart from that matter, I have promised to give some instruction in the magic arts to Gogoza, the doctor of that kraal, which shall befit him for being wizard to a tribe made great by alliance with thee."

Napo, thinking the talk of wizardry was done, uttered a curse. Setlu, for his part, looked towards the councillors uneasily, and at the same instant Tshola rose up and craved leave to speak.

"O chief," he said, "being but an humble doctor of this kraal, and, as thou knowest, ignorant of the high arts, I too would learn something of the magic of this great wizard."

Keshwan saw nothing of the sarcasm Tshola was putting into his words. Nor did he note the malicious smile that flitted across the Wolf's face, or the frantic signals the Dwarf made to him. He ambled along serenely to his doom.

"Of a surety, O chief," he said, with glib pleasantry, "such skill as I possess is at the disposal of thy kraal doctor; though I misdoubt that one of such common attainments shall ever learn the true arts save he begin young. Nevertheless, divination by fowl's blood——"

"Nay," put in Tshola, with sarcasm, "of such great wizardry I seek to know nothing, the same being far beyond the comprehension of my mind. But if perchance there be some slight matter in the dealing of thunderbolts wherein this Dabazooki could afford instruction——"

"And that readily," said Keshwan, flattered to be appealed to thus publicly.

"Doubtless," said Tshola, with great respect, not to say humility, "you have made some study of the lightnings and have measures to control them?"

"In such manner," replied Keshwan, swelling his chest, "that I was aforetime accounted chief of all wizards in lightning, rain-storms, and wind-tempests."

"Fool and liar!" groaned the Dwarf.

"Wherefore," pursued Tshola, concealing his elation with difficulty, "you would take it not ill from such as I were I to propose some simple test for the demonstration of your power?"

Keshwan was here at last struck by the fixity of

Katego's gaze and the somewhat sinister smile that had flickered to the lips of Tshola.

"It may be," said the latter, "that the test I shall devise will be accounted simple by one so versed in the high arts. Yet I, being but an ignorant and humble learner, crave that it shall not for that reason be despised."

"Of that I shall judge when the time comes," said Keshwan, licking his lips.

"So be it, Dabazooki," said Tshola, resuming his place. "Thou, O chief, hast heard that he is ready and willing for a trial of magic."

"I have heard," said Setlu, whereat the councillors murmured their assent.

The audience broke up, and Setlu called a council to go into some of the matters connected with the Giant's mission. From this Keshwan, having received a private and very urgent signal from the Bushman, excused himself on the plea of fatigue; but Napo was not so fortunate. Consequently, when the Giant reached the hut, only the Bushman was there, and his greeting was not cordial.

"For boastings, vain words, and all manner of foolishness there is not your equal in this land!" he exclaimed, harshly.

"And for cunning, ugliness, and falsity——" began Keshwan, warmly, when Baroa stopped him with a gesture.

"This trial of magic with Tshola, know you what the test shall be?"

"How can I know? Did not Tshola speak of it now for the first time?"

"Ay, for the first time in your ear, but the whole kraal has spoken of little else for a week past!"

"Why so?" asked the astonished Keshwan. "Is it so great a matter that this old fool should be taught a few tricks?"

"Pish!" exclaimed the Bushman, rudely. "This fool of whom you speak is the greatest worker with thunderbolts that ever has lived, since men remember! Ay"—for Keshwan's face took on a startled look—"so great and so certain in the handling of them that he

could bring a blast of fire from the blue sky; and has done it; and has shrivelled up a whole kraal, men, women, and children, with it! Well may you gape, for this magic of yours is like now to bring us all to a fine pass! Unless," he added, with sarcasm, "you have such arts as we have not seen in use yet. I pray, therefore, bring down a small thunderbolt, and curl up that dog with it, or frighten the birds with a little thunder!"

"Peace!" growled Keshwan, testily. "Even if this man is greatest in the trial of magic, what ill shall befall?"

"What ill?" exclaimed Baroa. "Why, this only, that he who fails shall be tied on the topmost bough of the highest tree!"

"*Hung?*" asked Keshwan, swallowing hard.

"Nay, not hung. Tied by the arms and a fire lighted beneath his feet!"

"Then shall he be roasted?" said Keshwan, feebly.

"Nay, not altogether that," said Baroa. "For it is held, according to the custom of these people, that he shall die by hanging, by fire, or by hunger, and there shall thereafter be argument as to what killed him."

"In which all shall be much concerned save himself," said Keshwan, gloomily. "And as to what manner shall this trial be?"

"It shall be that each wizard calls down from heaven an agreed number of thunderbolts. He who fails to do so in a given period shall be adjudged the loser."

"Then I, being challenged, shall fix the time and the number," said Keshwan, grimly. "It shall be one thunderbolt within the year."

Baroa laughed, with rude harshness.

"The number and the period shall be fixed by the council," he said. "There is more hanging on this matter than you know, Giant, and on your wizardries our lives may depend at this kraal!"

The arrival at that moment of Napo, wearing a troubled mien, gave some point to the assertion. Keshwan turned questioningly to the Dwarf.

"What profits all this talk of magic?" he asked. "If so be, as the Bushman says, Tshola shall overcome

me with his lightnings, better that we get hence with our skins and leave him to play with his thunderbolts alone!"

"And this," said the Dwarf, promptly, "has been decided by the council in argument just now, our enemies having pressed it on Setlu against his will—that if ye seek to evade the trial we three shall be treated as impostors and killed! It was that Wolf Katego who proposed this, on the pretence of the people being so divided, as between you and their own wizard, that they themselves have demanded such a guarantee. Henceforth, therefore, we are to be watched by our enemies so that none of us may escape."

Keshwan was on the point of venturing a reply, when Baroa, pointing through the hut door, said:

"Being busied with one trouble we have forgotten another."

Napo, looking out, cursed inwardly, for there was the love-sick Letika once more. However, on this occasion the course of true love ran smoother for the Dwarf. Sustained by the Bushman's explanations of the strange customs of his tribe, Napo did scarce more than glance at her, and might have spoiled a good chance, had not the Bushman reminded him.

"Speak to her," said Baroa, in an aside. "Else shall she misjudge that you really love her."

So the Dwarf asked Letika why her ears were so large and ugly, and for what reason she arranged her hair in an outlandish fashion that was like to frighten the very cows stone dead? To this Letika replied, with humility, that her ears were of large proportions in order that she might hear all that the Dwarf said and remember it; and, as for her hair, it was thus outlandishly contrived in order that not only cows but men should be smitten dead that dared intrude when her lord the Dwarf desired to have speech with her alone. She looked pointedly at Baroa and the Giant as she said this, whereat the Dwarf put in hastily:

"It is not according to our custom that girls should have speech privately before marriage, except with such as have no regard for them."

"Thine is a land full of the most strange and puzzling customs," said Letika.

"Of one such," replied the Dwarf, "the Bushman has already told you, namely that you forthwith repair with every art of love and persuasion to an enemy of mine, that your constancy may be thereby proved."

"What enemy hast thou in this kraal?" asked the girl, sharply, whereat Napo searched her face with a penetrating look, wondering how much she knew.

"None that is of your people," he replied; "yet by good fortune there is one here that is enemy to me. I speak of the prisoner Maponda."

The girl looked up surprised.

"Is it meet that I should make love to such as he—ugly, old in years, and suspected of enmity to my own people?"

"For that very reason it is most proper and according to custom," said the Dwarf. "The older, the uglier, and the more hateful, the better. Such is the custom——"

"A pest on such customs!" cried Letika. "And to what purpose shall all this foolishness be?"

"To the good and true purpose of trying your love and my faith in you," said Napo, feebly.

"And to this purpose," put in Baroa, scenting trouble, "that we may learn from Maponda something that we would know of a certain matter which shall be explained later."

"There seems to be more sense in that purpose than in the other," said the girl. "Nevertheless, I shall first have speech with my father on this matter."

"Nay," said the Dwarf, hastily, "that may not be, for it is a custom——"

"Cursed be your strange and outlandish customs!" cried Letika, her patience giving out. "Let me hear no more of them from this hour. I will do what you bid as to Maponda, and shall heed such of these abominable observances as you have told me so far. But no more of them do I wish to learn or practise!"

"Then go, cow!" thundered Napo. "Go, hideous creature, lest my eyes shrivel at the sight of you. And if perchance you return here to-morrow, and I can bear to gaze on your face and live, I shall counsel you what to say to Maponda!"

The girl went; and Napo, relieved of his true feelings by this conformity with the customs of his country, drew back into the hut and pushed the door to.

"This wooing," said the Bushman, sagely, "shall be such as few men have witnessed."

CHAPTER XXXI

Of Letika's wooing and what came of it; of Katego's hatred and what came of that; of the Bushman's cunning and a journey that ensued; and how the Lion was told that Fox and Wolf hunted him.

THE Bushman was right; and it was a wooing such as few women had endured.

Letika, infatuated by the huge proportions and military prowess of the Dwarf, fascinated by his ugliness, and admiring his giant strength—all which are qualities that frequently appeal to savage, and sometimes to civilised, womanhood—came back next day and the next, as the Bushman expected, and as Napo feared. Sustained in the belief by many a private conversation with Baroa, she perceived in the disagreeableness of the Dwarf only the pretence that was laid upon him by the peculiar customs of his country. And in this there was nothing so very peculiar after all, seeing that every tribe, her own included, had customs in love, courtship and marriage of so fantastic a character that if Napo had insisted on killing her first under promise of marrying her afterwards, she might have declined the honour without being particularly surprised at the form it took.

In one tribe, for instance, no girl could possibly be married before she was chased two miles by the prospective bridegroom, and soundly thrashed when he caught her. If she was not beaten hard she would consider he was lacking in the right qualities of a lover, and would reject him. In another tribe (this one was more civilised) the thrashings took place after marriage. In all savage countries of that period hammerings and hair-pullings were recognised conventionalities in every love affair. Whether the woman got the best or the

worst of it before marriage, the man nearly always got the worst of it after; in which circumstance the sociologists say they have discovered the only really remarkable approximation of barbarism to civilisation. But in one respect civilisation has worked a wise and exemplary change. Because so many hard knocks and nasty sayings were endured by savages in the brief courtship, their married life was insufferably dull and happy; whereas the civilised custom is to confine all the nice things to the short courtship and give all the nasty ones during marriage because it lasts longer.

In some tribes all sorts of humiliations had to be inflicted on a man before he could be made a husband, which enabled him to be immune from them when he was one. Thus he had to purchase his matrimonial felicity by sitting for two days with mud on his head while the old women of the bride's kraal threw rocks at him, and they seldom missed; but that was nothing. Many a civilised married man would have stood a week of it, and thought it cheap, if it would have bought him the matrimonial happiness he did not get. Sometimes the bride had to be clayed over till she looked like an eathernware teapot, and left out in the sun to bake dry; then the bridegroom would chop her out with a hoe, and thrash her amid general rejoicings; this being held to signify that he had chivalrously dug her up out of her spinsterhood and was chipping the last remnants of false modesty off her in doing so. All the courtship and marriage customs were symbolical of something or other.

Letika, of course, knew this; but, being only human, she resolved secretly that when her probationary period was over, some of the things Napo had said to her would be remembered to good purpose.

Meanwhile the girl, whose passion for the Dwarf deepened with every day, unwillingly laid siege to the heart of Maponda, as instructed, though, according to the reports she made to Napo from time to time, the prisoner remained adamant. Napo, hoping that by-and-by she might be able to trap his enemy into some damaging admissions, gave elaborate instructions as to how this was to be achieved; but some instinct, which

belied his imperfect knowledge of the female sex, made him refrain from so much as mentioning the main object of his inquiries, namely his Golden Glory. Or perhaps Baroa warned him. Anyway, the look in Letika's eyes when they followed every movement of the Dwarf's face and form, suggested that the most blind and humble love might be turned by circumstances into as blind a hatred.

"Strange," said the Giant, musingly, "that on such form as his," and he gave his own chest a mighty thump, "a woman should bestow her eyes so longingly!"

"Making oath as she does so," answered Baroa spitefully, "that if any wind-bladder wizard that is afraid of his own lightnings uttered to her a word of love, she would so smite him straightway that Tshola would have no need of a thunderbolt for wiping him out."

"And resolving doubtless," retorted Keshwan, "that if the Dwarf fails her she will find comfort in the wooing of a lean, shrivelled and ill-smelling bush-rat on two legs."

But just then Letika was quite obviously thinking of neither bush-rats nor wizards, for she had eyes only for Napo. She had just come from Maponda, though, as she put it, with little enough food in her basket.

"But for thee, Dwarf," she said meaningly, "I would strike down this traitor to his death rather than have speech with him on any matter!"

Napo shifted about uneasily.

"A traitor most surely," he made answer. "Yet shall he serve a purpose ere he pays the price of his treachery."

"Be not so sure, Dwarf. This man that ye call Owl has a cunning that would better befit him to be named Fox. Even the Lion"—and she looked at Napo pointedly—"may be outmatched when Fox and Wolf hunt together!"

Again the Dwarf glanced sharply at the girl, wondering what she knew.

"Get hence, fool and chatterer!" he exclaimed, anxious to be rid of her so that he might take counsel

with Baroa and the Giant. "Take note carefully of this Owl's demeanour, and say naught of the matter to any but us three!"

"To thee only, Dwarf," said Letika, dropping her voice and lowering her eyes. "Wizards I fear and Bushmen I hate!"

"Then if ye have love at all and that love is for me," said the Dwarf, nipping a tender passage in the bud, "bear well in mind that I have no eyes for female monsters of ungainly habit with faces to sour the food of a whole kraal in the cooking pots!"

"Yet hath such an one love and in plenty for him that gave her the gift of life," said Letika submissively. She rose up and stood looking at him for a moment. Then she said quietly:

"Dwarf, whether there be truth or falsity in all these things ye say, or love in the harsh speeches thy hideous and abominable customs impose on thee, there may be a time when the hand of Letika shall repay life with life! Perchance then I shall hear softer speeches."

With that she went, leaving the Dwarf to ruminate on the chances, which seemed remote, of gaining Maponda's secret.

"Better to dig a spear into him and rip it from his vitals," was Keshwan's comment, when he heard what had passed.

"Better still," said Baroa, "for ye to make league with Tshola and call down between ye one great lightning that shall slay every one of our enemies with a blast, and leave us to pursue our journey. Else it seemeth, Dwarf, we shall stay here till beards grow to our waists!"

But, as it happened, the very next evening Letika, when she came, belied anticipations in some particulars.

"Dwarf," she said, setting the food down at the hut door, "I have sung to this Owl and the Owl hath hooted. Of Sekonyela he will say nothing; but I know now where Maponda came from and whither, if liberty was his, he would return straightway."

"Then speak, fool!" commanded Napo.

"Yonder," she said, pointing to the north-east,

"where there is a mountain so high that its crest cannot be seen, for it goes up into the clouds."

"I know that mountain," said the Bushman, sharply. "It is called by us Quathula, the Mountain of the Mist. It lies beyond a great plain. I journeyed within sight of it once very long ago."

"Get you hence, girl, with your chattering tongue!" roared the Dwarf, who was anxious that nobody should overhear the discussion of this important news; and the girl went. (And Baroa took care to tell her soon after how exceedingly the love-sick Dwarf praised and belauded her in his private conversation for bringing this information in proof of her devotion.)

"Now tell us all you know, Bushman," said the Dwarf, when they were alone.

But Baroa's recollections of the place were somewhat hazy. However, he remembered its direction, and the fact that this mountain overtopped a deep and rugged valley, jutting up from it to a height of some three thousand feet, and ending in a spike of bare rock. Around this rock there was frequently a cloud of mist, which sometimes, when the wind blew down the valley, descended in great rolling billows, leaving the peak bare and hiding the middle slopes. The ascent was rugged, steep, and rocky; where, thought Napo, when the place had been described, Sekonyela might well have established himself for a time in such a fastness. Yet of this he was by no means certain, and only Letika was able to find out.

However, Letika failed. Not improbably, the Dwarf thought, Maponda had begun to suspect something, and would say no more. At all events, despite some sound ratings, and a most lover-like comparison between her intelligence and that of a dead dog, Letika professed herself at the end of her resources in the matter of Sekonyela's whereabouts.

Meanwhile other influences were at work, and events began to move. Great pressure was being brought to bear on Setlu to have Maponda arraigned before the council. The chief mover in this request was Katego the Wolf. That astute individual, gathering from Tshola that some weeks might elapse ere a storm could

be fetched along from which the rival wizards could draw the material for their display, perceived that other means than the projected fireworks might be necessary to rid the kraal of the presence of the strangers.

It was all the more imperative that something should be done, because the populace was becoming impatient and was clamouring for the fireworks. This put Tshola in a disagreeable quandary. The old fraud had so often claimed to have fetched up violent and devastating storms, as well as to have prevented them, that he was now under suspicion of not bringing one because he shirked the contest. This he denied, declaring that the powerful spells exerted by Dabazooki were to blame; to which Keshwan, hearing of it, rejoined by inviting Tshola to call up the biggest and brimstoniest thunderstorm he could lay hands to anywhere in the heavens, and he (Keshwan) would forfeit his head if it could be proved that he was offering the least resistance. Tshola, cornered by this offer, took refuge in the assertion that neither he nor Dabazooki could be expected to summon up a storm on such momentous issues, since, if either did so, the other would assuredly doctor and bewizard that storm, and so immunise himself against harm and bring the whole trial to naught. Being appealed to, Keshwan himself had to assent to this theory, otherwise he would be expected to fetch the storm along himself. It was accordingly agreed by the wizards, to the grumbling dissatisfaction of the people, that for this once a storm must be allowed to arrive entirely of its own accord, and without human intervention.

The kraal settled down to wait, and it soon became evident to Katego, and to Tshola also, that if the trial by lightning was delayed much longer its main purpose would be defeated. For the three travellers, friends and advisers as they were of Setlu, were becoming more and more popular with the soldiers and the people. In the council, however, a cloud of jealousy, distrust, and intrigue was growing on the horizon; and Setlu saw with uneasiness that it grew bigger every day. Setlu, though steeped in all the abominable superstitions of the time, was no fool. He thoroughly believed in the efficacy of witchcraft, and, like most of the chiefs of

his day, went in perpetual fear of the wizards. He had good enough reason to be afraid of them and of their hold on the people; because in nine cases out of ten, when a chief was deposed or murdered, a wizard instigated the crime. Nor, from the nature of their calling, was there any disease, disaster, private affliction or public calamity in which they did not claim to have had a hand.

But his implicit belief in the powers of witchcraft did not blind Setlu to the fact that the witch-doctors, whatever their rank in the profession, were without any exception liars and falsifiers of expert standing, traitors, often murderers, and always political intriguers of the most dangerous type. For these qualities he hated them cordially—in secret; and in public treated them with as much deference as people generally exhibit to those who play most unblushingly on their credulity. Naturally the one he feared and hated most was the one he knew best, namely Tshola.

Several times Setlu visited the travellers in their hut and talked with them on these matters. It was a remark dropped by him on one of these occasions that gave the Bushman an idea and, as will be seen, sent him presently on a momentous journey.

The travellers had discussed at great length plans for effecting their escape from the kraal should necessity arise. It was also desired by Napo that the whereabouts of Sekonyela should be put to the proof. But the difficulty was for any of the party to get away or make any inquiries without exciting suspicion; in fact, according to the Bushman's report, they were being closely watched.

One day Setlu, very much troubled by the importunities of his councillors, arrived with the object of urging on the distracted Keshwan the necessity for fetching along a thunderstorm of the proper dimensions for getting to grips with old Tshola. The prolonged absence of thunderstorms was evidently disconcerting to Setlu's faith in wizardry. He therefore asked Keshwan whether there was not some art or specific known to him by which a storm could be summoned by mutual consent of the two rivals which would forthwith turn round

and destroy one of them—meaning Tshola. Keshwan was on the point of saying no, when the Bushman interposed with a brilliant falsehood.

"Ay, O chief, such a specific is known to our people," he said. "It is created by the compounding of certain herbs, the handling of which is unknown to Dabazooki or any black man. We yellow folk have used it in past ages, though the secret seems like to die, since none that I know of practise it now. Still, if thou wilt give sanction, I will search for the herb, and see whether my remembrance of its uses will serve in the making of a storm enchantment."

This was just the sort of story to make a great impression on the mind of an intelligent statesman of that period, and Setlu was at once profoundly interested. Keshwan, however, looked up with a scowl, wondering if the Bushman's glib prattle was going to impose on him some further feats of devilry he could not perform.

"Where is this herb found?" asked Setlu.

"Maybe in two places, or perhaps three," said Baroa. "Only one such place is known to me. The old wizards of our people have said that the herb grew, though sparsely, in a certain cleft in the Mountain of the Mist."

Keshwan and the Dwarf understood now.

"And," pursued the Bushman, "thither I am prepared to go and seek it, returning here possibly before the new moon."

Setlu thought for a moment.

"At the least," he said, presently, "no harm can come of this venture, and it may bring good. They press me continually to bring this prisoner, Maponda, to trial, and I am sore puzzled how to resist them, which I do for your sake, O Dwarf. Now I shall give out that this Monkey has gone on a journey to the chief Gotomba who lives in that direction, and of this herb let nothing be said by anyone. But when the Bushman returns there shall be the trial by lightning if he finds the herb; and if not, Maponda shall be brought to trial in any case. Thus shall I be rid of both boils in one dressing."

That evening when Letika appeared at the hut door only the Dwarf and the Giant were within. Baroa the Bushman was already far upon his journey.

CHAPTER XXXII

In which Keshwan curses the lightning; Napo howls for help; Letika is given her life again; the reader gets a glimpse of Golden Glory; and the Dwarf remembers a presentiment.

SEVENTEEN days elapsed before Baroa returned. In that period Letika made no appreciable headway with the prisoner, but other interests hanging upon that matter were not allowed to languish. With his senses sharpened to approaching danger, Napo saw signs in plenty of a plot developing in which Katego and the wizard were the most active participants. That others, however, were taking a hand at the game was soon to be made clear.

One night Ratlali and Sigwa, the two captains of Tetwiza, came to the hut secretly, bringing with them Qedini, the Captain of the Girls; and all had something for the Dwarf's ears.

Each had heard it in conversation with the soldiers, a whisper here, a word dropped there, hints and suggestions for the most part, but enough to prick sharp ears, and set keen wits going. Ratlali told how the regiments of Katego and Nabomba were being corrupted with lies about the three strangers, with whom it was said Setlu was in league against some of the headmen of his own kraal. Qedini reported more exactly that two of his soldiers had asked to be transferred to Nabomba's regiment, having heard there was to be a fight shortly for which only the veteran regiments would be chosen and receive a share of the loot. Sigwa had much the same tale to tell, embroidered by the additional information that Dabazooki was preparing a most potent magic with which to exterminate half the tribe and raise up Napo to chieftainship over the remainder.

"In all this the hand of Tshola moves," said Ratlali. "Fetch down the lightning, Dabazooki, and slay him ere a mischief befalls."

"It seems to me passing strange," said Sigwa, "that for the first time in living knowledge two renowned wizards find their arts helpless to aid them."

"A curse be on the lightning!" exclaimed Keshwan, irreverently. "I am sick to death of this talk of magic! Know ye I am a soldier first and a wizard after. And what my magic fails to do, my spear does for me!"

"Then take a spear and end both Tshola and the Wolf," suggested Qedini.

"Ay," said the Dwarf—"and have the whole kraal in arms against us, and Setlu with them!"

"Nevertheless, if we are not careful," said Ratlali, "this Wolf will have many in his trap."

"And," said Sigwa, "if some in this kraal speak truth, it will be a trap of a woman's setting."

The Dwarf looked up sharply.

"A woman in this matter also?" he asked.

"A woman in most matters that give death to the sons of men," said Ratlali, cynically.

"This one is a girl ye should have reason to know well, Dwarf," said Sigwa, with a laugh. "I speak of Letika, daughter of Shosimba."

"Has she, then, snared the Wolf in her net?" asked Keshwan, laughing loudly.

"Whether that be so I know not," said Sigwa. "But she and the Owl have had conversations secretly together. They have been seen"; whereat Dwarf and Giant exchanged glances.

"Take heed, Dwarf," said Ratlali, "lest this girl whom ye saved bring death to thee, and perchance to others!"

"Better to finish her with a spear and the Wolf with her," suggested Qedini.

"Better to let the buck run till it tires, then shall it be killed the easier," said Napo. "Methinks there will be killing in plenty ere all this tale is told."

The next evening, when Letika came to the hut as usual and set down the food, she looked at the Dwarf with a strange and penetrating glance.

"I have learned something of Maponda and something of thee," she said presently. "Of which would ye hear first?"

"Of Maponda," said the Dwarf.

"Nay," said the girl with a slow smile—"of thee first, Dwarf, for on the answer, whether or not that thing is true, may hang much. But first let this Giant of thine withdraw, for I would speak privately."

"It is the custom——" began Napo, when Letika broke in:

"If thy pestilential customs and abominable observances are of more account than what ye should hear from me, so be it," and she made as though to leave them.

Keshwan got up with a grunt and went out.

"And now, Dwarf," said Letika, the moment he disappeared, "I have learned that ye journey in this land in search of a woman. Is that true?"

"Ay, and in Letika I have found her," began the Dwarf, with a feeble attempt at gallantry. She cut him short with a laugh.

"So! Then be sure, Dwarf, that in Letika thou hast found a woman not a snake, for on that subject some that know me would have doubt!"

"If it is of women Maponda has told thee," said Napo, taking the bull by the horns, "let him tell where this woman is that I have come to find; since ye know something, know all!"

"Ay, and all I know of a surety!" burst out the girl with sudden fury. "For this woman, whom Maponda tells me is beautiful as the night, and wears a Glory about her head, ye have come hither, and would use me as the instrument of thy passion for her! I know it! Maponda knows it! But I say this, Dwarf," and her voice rose up, vibrant with emotion, "first shall that woman pass over the corpse of Letika before she reaches thy arms!"

With that she rose up, a picture of jealous fury, stood, shaking like a leaf, as she looked down on him, and—burst into tears.

It was, of course, exactly what any angry, love-sick, disappointed, jealous woman might be expected to do,

given the same circumstances, in savage or civilised society. And most men, whether civilised or barbarian, would have seen it coming, and got ready with a "don't-cry-dear" speech, or perhaps a little cheap sarcasm, or possibly a pretence of absolute indifference, or even a sledgehammer rating if they had the pluck to do it. Women have tried this sudden tear-burst in all ages since the world began; and in the course of centuries men have learned how to take it, according to circumstances. Yet here was one of them, with insight and understanding in most things, as utterly and completely floored by it as if this was the very first time that a woman had ever burst out crying while she laughed up her sleeve. Perhaps Napo lacked discernment of the real motive because this particular woman did not really have a sleeve to laugh up. Anyway, he failed to observe the eagerness with which she scanned his face through her tears, opening her fingers a little bit apart to do so. Never having been cried over by a woman in his life before, he did not see it. And, failing to see it, he did in his ignorance and stupidity a very effective thing which a wiser man would never have thought to do: he bellowed for help.

The Giant came running at a bound, and behold, there was the heroic Dwarf, a picture of fear and trepidation, with nothing more terrible before him than a young girl, blubbering!

Keshwan looked from one to the other at first staggered, then scornful, and finally let loose a burst of rude laughter that almost cracked his ribs. But it was short-lived merriment. Letika's tears dried as if by magic, and she swung round on the Dwarf's deliverer like a tiger.

"Dog that comes running at his master's whistle!" she screamed. "Why must I always be affronted thus, with ye or that prowling Bushman slinking like jackals around a sleeping lion? Get hence to thy straw, dog, and lie there, leaving thy master in private till he needs thee!"

"Methought he called my name but a moment ago," said Keshwan, wiping his eyes.

"Ye thought, and ye thought, and ye thought!"

shouted Letika malignantly. "Whereas the Dwarf cried out only against *me*, according to one of those abominable customs by which he sets such store."

"It was so," said the Dwarf feebly, but glad he had shouted nevertheless.

"Then, if it was so and ye lie not——" began the Giant warmly; but he got no further. Letika, with a spit of rage, shot out her left hand and dealt him a most unmaidenly smack full on the cheek. The Giant, taken unawares, staggered beneath the blow, and next second he had plunged forward and grasped an assegai. Napo knew enough of life in that period to be aware that an insult of less magnitude, even from a woman, had often been wiped out in blood. And he knew, also, that if a rash act was done by Keshwan at this moment, it would be seized on by their enemies to such purpose that if one of the travellers escaped from the kraal alive he would be lucky. So in a flash the Dwarf sprang between furious girl and enraged Giant. In the same moment the assegai came down, missed the girl's breast by an inch, because the Dwarf turned it, and buried itself in the fleshy part of Napo's arm.

In an instant the rage of Letika and the fury of Keshwan died out.

"O Dwarf!" cried the girl, wresting the assegai from his arm, "to think that again this life has been given me by thee!"

"And that thine, Dwarf, nearly paid forfeit to a thrust of mine!" said Keshwan, with a gulp of absolute misery.

"There is but a scratch to show for it," said Napo. "Rather would I that than that any life should fall for so small cause and reason."

"Let me bind his hurt with these strands of grass," said Keshwan to the girl, who was washing the wound with water from Napo's gourd.

Between the two they bound up the wound, and the flow of blood stopped.

"For this I ask pardon," said Letika, humbly—"of thee, Dwarf, and of thee, Giant."

"And I, too, ask pardon from ye both," said Keshwan. "Yet when ye fondle a man's cheek again,

girl, take heed that thy hand falls softer upon it, for it fell very hard."

With that he turned and walked off, a good deal shaken up and ashamed of himself. And then it was that the Dwarf, looking up at the girl's face, saw something more in a woman's tears than should frighten any man; for she was still weeping.

"Weep not, child, for so small a matter," he said gently, whereat a thrill passed through the shaking frame of Letika.

"Twice have ye bought me, Dwarf, with such price in the peril of thine own life as few give for the love of a woman," said Letika. "Gave ye that price ever to this woman crowned with Glory whom Maponda says ye seek?"

"She that I seek is not of our flesh or blood," replied Napo, "and if Maponda has said otherwise he deceived thee."

"He said she was of such like only as ye could have fashioned by much dreaming, and swore he had never seen her."

"Wherein even a traitor spoke truth," said Napo, with a smile. "Yet he spoke truth also when he said she wears a Glory about her head. Trouble no more about her, Letika; for how shall a man have passion such as the living know for that which is set above his soul higher than the stars above this earth of ours?"

"Is she then dead, being not of our flesh and blood?" asked Letika—"else, Dwarf, ye speak in riddles that no man can understand."

The Dwarf passed his hand wearily across his brow.

"Living or dead, who knoweth!" he said sadly. "Yet methinks that in death only is there rest from trouble and wandering."

The girl looked down at him baffled, mystified and curious.

"Dwarf," she said humbly, "there is mystery in what ye say beyond my poor wits to fathom. But there is truth enough in this: that if the body of Letika were the only bridge between thee and thy Golden Glory, it would lie there for thy feet to tread, if ye so willed it!"

"And in such love, perchance," said Napo, with a

strange smile, "a man might find his Glory on the earth without looking to the stars!"

She left him then, wondering. But she looked back. Napo was standing before the hut door, dwarfed, bent, hideous and twisted, yet having with it all an air of nobility: a strange, motionless, almost unearthly figure, that roused in Letika's superstitious bosom a sensation approaching awe.

"Wizardry!" she thought to herself, that being the easiest explanation of anything that was hard to understand in her country.

"Madness!" Maponda had said aloud to her, a little earlier, spitting on his prison floor to indicate the most pitiful degree of insanity he knew of.

Napo, looking out into the deepening dusk, remembered the presentiment that had come over him when the travellers joined the wedding party on the way to Tetwiza's kraal. "Whither do we journey?" Keshwan had asked, in response to his objections. "Whither fate leads us," he had answered. "Mayhap to great glory, mayhap to death!"

He looked from the hut door across the darkening hills, and it seemed that the shadows of the world fell about his heart and chilled it. He saw there in the west the pulsating light which lingered gloriously behind the hidden sun. Presently the sky became a sheet of flame and splendour, and then of slowly dying fires that burnt the hills to black. And high up in the depths above a star hung like a jewel on the breast of Night.

"There is a Golden Glory that haunts the dreams of men," said Napo to himself, and sighed.

That night Baroa the Bushman returned.

CHAPTER XXXIII

Baroa the Bushman encounters some strange monsters, acquires important information, and introduces a new magic; Tshola the wizard draws the line at five hundred thunderbolts, but agrees to one; and the trial by lightning is fixed for the next chapter.

It was long after dark when Baroa crept into the hut, and the first words he said were these:

"I have found such wizardry for you, Keshwan, as shall make you greatest of magicians in the whole land!"

Then he asked for food, for he was famished. When they gave it him he ate steadily for twenty minutes without saying a word.

"Speak, Monkey!" said Keshwan, when his patience was exhausted.

"We would know something of Sekonyela and that mountain," said Napo. "Leave this wizard foolery till another season."

"Nevertheless," said Baroa, "in this wizardry there happens to be more wisdom than foolery just now. As for the mountain, it will stay where it is while I talk."

With that he commenced his story, and to the tale of his journey the two listened in amazement.

Into all the details of the narrative there is no need to enter. It had taken him a week's journeying to get to the Mountain of the Mist; and even then, because of a surprising adventure, he never got nearer than a sight of it. But he reached the valley at whose top it stood, and saw the great wreaths of cloud swirling about it, and above them the upstanding peak of bare rock which he had remembered so well on his visit many years before. Several kraals stood in the valley, large enough

to have accommodated a thousand people. But, to his surprise, all were empty. Scouting around amongst them, Baroa found footprints which led in the direction of a wooded gully where there was a stream. He followed the spoor and came on a small party of old men and women, sheltering in a cave. They were half starved, and paralysed with terror. From them he learned that a large force of soldiers was massing on the far side of the mountain, evidently in preparation for a descent on the country.

"The Zulus!" put in Napo. "Did I not tell you, Bushman, when first we met in that cave?"

"Ay," said Baroa; "and they told me of a strange chief with a large following that had already swept the countryside and was preparing to come down with the Zulus."

"It is Sekonyela, without doubt," said the Dwarf. "Of this I heard something when I visited the Zulus, seeking to trace his whereabouts. Go on, Bushman!"

So Baroa went on, the remarkable part of his story being still to come. For it seemed from these old people in the cave that farther up the valley a race had just established itself, not large in numbers, but of such strange and terrifying appearance that at their first coming the whole population fled, leaving their kraals empty. These people were of the Bushman's colour, yellow, but of a larger build. Yet they were not fashioned like any other men known on the earth, save as to their heads and trunks. Below that they developed into monsters of great size, speed, and fury, having four legs and a tail and a second head, the like of which for hideousness and malformation no man could conceive who had not seen it. It possessed eyes that blazed and nostrils that snorted, and behind it a great mane of hair like a lion's. These terrifying devils had come down the valley with the fury of a tempest, driving all before them. To some they spoke with a great and awful noise, which when it sounded, straightway, by the power of its enchantment, a man fell dead. But few were thus brought to their deaths, the fear of the people being so great that at first sight of these monsters they fled everywhere, leaving the valley desolate.

Now when Baroa heard all this from the lips of the old people, he was at first quite convinced that these must be some of the monsters which, it was well known and honourably attested, had their place of abode in the fastnesses of the Drakenberg, or Dragon Mountain. But after some further conversation he changed his mind suddenly, left the terror-stricken old people where they were, and went straight up the valley to where the invaders were encamped. And there he found, as he expected, a party of armed Griquas, sitting around a fire, their horses knee-haltered and grazing near by, and their heavy muzzle-loading guns stacked conveniently at hand.

Many years before Baroa, in crossing this territory with a wandering party of his people, had journeyed into a corner of Griqualand. There he had seen both horses and guns, which, however, were at the period of this history utterly unknown to the inhabitants of Basutoland. Baroa was now witnessing the effect of their first appearance on a people who, in the years to come, were to be known throughout the world as the finest horsemen and shots amongst the black-skinned races. But nobody would have predicted it then. For, at first sight of the horses, men, women, and children were smitten with terror and ran for their lives.

The Griquas had stolen the horses, probably, or got them and the guns in barter with the Cape Dutch, and were just now beginning to maraud the territories adjoining their own. It was not very long, therefore, before the tribes that wandered round and about Basutoland made acquaintance with them, generally to the heavy cost of the blacks. But, as will be seen, the first entry of the Griquas into that territory was a good stroke of business for the inhabitants.

Baroa, who knew something of their language, fraternised with the Griquas. He gave them valuable information about the country, and got some himself; and in a very short time he found himself striking a bargain as between their leader, Witbooi, and the chief Setlu. Part of the bargain was this, that in return for the friendly assistance of Setlu, and also that of Napo and Keshwan, which he promised, he was to be given a keg

of gunpowder, the use of which he well knew, and two men were to help him bring it to the kraal of Setlu. Moreover, if Witbooi and his followers would consent to bear arms in the Dwarf's adventure against Sekonyela, they should have full share in any loot that fell to the Dwarf if he conquered. As to this, Witbooi appeared to have his doubts, if, as the Bushman supposed, Sekonyela was the chief massing an army behind the mountain. Because, said Witbooi, already more than ten thousand soldiers were gathered there, and others were coming. Baroa promised to carry word of this matter to the Dwarf, and to send back a message by those that carried the gunpowder whether Setlu would engage to take part in any operations against the Zulus. To which Witbooi answered that Setlu would have all he could do to look after himself if the Zulus came his way with so great a multitude.

So Baroa returned as speedily as he could, bringing two men with him, who carried the powder and were at this moment in hiding with it in a clump of bushes on the deserted parade-ground.

Dwarf and Giant heard the recital to the end. Then:

"Of what use shall be this fire-sand?" asked Keshwan, for such was the name given to the powder. "And where are those magic roots that you journeyed to bring? Methinks that a mixture of roots and sand——"

"Peace, fool!" said Baroa. "The roots I have are for Setlu's eye, and the magic they make would not frighten a fly from a dog's ear! But as to this fire-sand, not even you, with all your wonders of wizardry, have seen the like. For this magic shall bring the lightning not from the sky, but from the ground——"

"You lie," said Keshwan.

"Nay, it is true," said the Dwarf. "The yellow People by the Great Water [the Portuguese] have used this very thing, moving away mountains and killing men. They also speak through tubes with a death-dealing noise."

"Is it so?" said Baroa. "Methought only the Griquas possessed the secret."

"In the country of the Zulu there have appeared men

that are called Amalungu [white men], who also use it," said Napo.

"By it there shall be fashioned such thunderbolts as no man has ever witnessed in this land!" exclaimed the Bushman. "Come, let us go now, stealthily, to where the two Griquas await us, and make plans for the working of this magic."

In the clump of bushes on the parade-ground they found the two men, shrivelled and yellow creatures, sitting on the keg of powder. Keshwan, when he saw them, looked like bolting, but the Dwarf restrained him.

"See!" he said, taking up a handful of the coarse, black powder. "Here, Keshwan, is a strange though simple magic! Harmless, and with a not unpleasant smell, though horrible to the taste, these little black grains, if fire touched them, would ascend forthwith with a roaring flame that would leap to heaven! Buried in the ground, these grains would seem harmless and helpless; yet in such case, if but a spark fell on them, behold they would spout forth with a roar of sound and a rush of fury that would rend the whole earth! Not all your bubble-blowers and bones and bladders could achieve so much as a single grain of this wondrous material! But a little portion of it is put in a place proper to that enterprise, touched with a spark, and behold half the mountain has disappeared! But so much, Keshwan, as you might hold betwixt thumb and fingers, is put in a special tube, is raised and directed against you, and behold, with a great noise and a heavy smoke, you are stretched dead, no man knowing how or why! Wonderful, O Keshwan, that all the wizardry of all the world hath accomplished less than one of these little black grains may accomplish in a moment! Would you that these people gave demonstration of its powers?"

"Nay," said Keshwan, as pertly as he had ever said a thing in his life; and the two Griquas laughed.

"It is all as he has said," observed one of the men, named Sturmaan. "With this barrel of powder we could rend this kraal so that none in it could be found whole again!"

"Then methinks," said Keshwan, "there shall be

some use for this magic if Katego shows his teeth overmuch."

"And that use shall be accomplished whether he does or no," said the Bushman. "Hearken now, for we have much to discuss."

For a full hour they talked, and at last even Keshwan was convinced that with this new magic the power of wizardry in that land could be revolutionised. He came to this conclusion when the second Griqua, named Aasvogel, had given a demonstration on a small scale with a few pinches of the powder heaped up on a flat rock. A spark from the Bushman's tinder did what was necessary, and sent the renowned wizard over backwards in his amazement and fright.

"Such as you have seen in that little spurt of flame," said Napo, "shall be enlarged by ten thousand times, Giant, till the earth trembles with the horror of it!"

"No such wizardry shall ever have been seen in this land," said Baroa.

"Nor," said Keshwan, dubiously, "shall the wizard who practises it be seen in the land again, if he draws too near when he does it."

"Nay," said the Bushman, "there shall be safety for the wizard, for these here shall apply the fire from a distance, as you shall see when the time comes. And now," he added, "let this barrel be well hidden, and let us ask Setlu that on the fourth night from now, at the hour of midnight, shall the trial by magic be held."

Next day, Dwarf, Giant, and Bushman were early at the council. All the councillors were present, including Tshola, who, quite unsuspicious of the surprise in store, asked the Giant casually if he had word of the whereabouts of a thunderstorm anywhere within reach. To this the Giant replied that he had heard of none so far; that probably the lightning had taken fright because of the designs of so great a wizard as Tshola, and was staying away in consequence; that he would look into the matter, since he was weary of inactivity, and if need be would have to exercise his arts to force the lightning to come down somehow; with other remarks of a like nature, whereat Tshola laughed shrilly and with calculated malice. But when the council was about to

disperse there was a surprise in store for Tshola. For Dabazooki the wizard stood up and craved leave to speak.

"O chief," he said, "I have a matter of grave urgency whereon thy ruling is desired. Know that by my magic it has been revealed that great evil is belike to fall on thy people because there are two wizards here seeking the mastery, neither being of strength to protect the kraal from evil while the other works charms against him. Let Tshola say whether this is so!"

"It is so," said Tshola, somewhat taken aback.

"Further," said Keshwan, "it is revealed to me that many good wizards for a good distance about are being deprived of their powers unwittingly by the evil influence of this dispute. Is it not so?"

"It is so," assented Tshola.

"Wherefore, O chief," went on Keshwan, "it follows by natural course that if this land is subjected to sore peril, of which I shall speak further into thy ear only, O chief, our doctorings must fail of their purpose to avert it. Is that so, also?"

"It is so!"

"Then, O chief, this being freely admitted and well known, it behoves that the two wizards shall, before any such peril overtake us, end their rivalry by trial of magic forthwith. I crave leave, therefore, that thou hearest me as to the fixing of a time and place!"

Tshola and Katego exchanged astonished glances, and were more surprised still when Setlu answered with great promptitude. As a matter of fact, Baroa had privately told Setlu that he had the required herbs for Dabazooki's purpose. But of this neither Tshola nor the councillors were aware, nor did Setlu know anything of the gunpowder.

"Then, O chief," said Keshwan, "I crave that the trial be held on the fourth night from now, at midnight; that the place be the drilling-ground, so that all may assemble and see the trial; and that messengers be forthwith dispatched summoning to witness it every wizard, even the farthest that may be fetched in such time. Let Tshola, who has challenged me, now speak!"

A hum of excitement went round at this, and Tshola looked puzzled at the unexpected turn of events.

"And of what nature shall this trial be, O chief?" he asked, with a glance at the cloudless heavens.

"A trial by lightning, surely," replied Setlu. "Such was thy request."

"Ay, O chief, a trial by lightning. But let the council fix the number of thunderbolts to each wizard."

"Mayhap, since the time for preparation is short," said Katego, maliciously, "justice will be served to both parties by directing that there shall be ten thunderbolts to each!"

A murmur of protest arose.

"An over large number," said one of the councillors.

"Ten each would be twenty in all if neither fails," said another. "Such a deluge of lightning hath been seen nowhere in the land."

"Methinks," said a third, "six thunderbolts each, the first achieving that number to be adjudged winner, would suffice to settle the dispute."

Tshola looked relieved, and several of the councillors agreed that six would be enough.

"How say you, Tshola, are you agreed to six?" asked Setlu.

"Ay, O chief!"

"And you, Dabazooki, are you agreed?"

"Nay, O chief!" said Keshwan. "I, being challenged in this matter, demand the right to settle the number. Let there be five hundred thunderbolts!"

A gasp, half of astonishment and half of laughter, burst from the councillors.

"He is mad!" said Katego.

"Such number shall cause the heavens to split past mending," said another of the councillors, indignantly.

"And the earth to dissolve straightway in raging fires!" said someone else.

"Truly this wizard is mad!" exclaimed Tshola, puzzled and annoyed. "The causing of five hundred thunderbolts would be work for all the wizards in the world together, and would take not one night but a full year. Moreover, there is no sign in the heavens of any storm wherefrom so vast a quantity of lightning could be drawn."

"Then," said Keshwan, with annoying calmness,

"you refuse before the whole council to accept this trial?"

"Most surely do I refuse!" said Tshola, not disguising his anger. "If you are in truth wizard and not fool, play with the councillors—and with me—no longer!"

"As to whether I am fool or wizard, that shall all men judge shortly," replied the Giant. "Nevertheless, five hundred thunderbolts being clearly beyond your powers, six may be beyond them. Therefore, in order that you may have full scope for such simple magic as you know, I say there shall be one only!"

"To this Tshola shall agree, surely," put in Katego, with a cunning smile. "Provided his shall be the first trial."

"His shall be the first and second trials, and mine third," said Keshwan.

"That is beyond fair and lenient," said a councillor.

"Moreover," pursued Keshwan, "for all such period as the trial lasts, Tshola shall have two trials to my one!"

"Nay," said Tshola, his professional dignity offended, "first trial I accept, since it belongs me, you having had choice of the number of thunderbolts... But as to the order of trial thereafter, it shall be equal, each taking turn, one following the other. Else shall it be said that I prevailed over you by reason less of my skill than of your clemency."

"So be it as you say," replied Keshwan. "All, then, are of clear understanding that there shall be one thunderbolt, and that Tshola shall make trial first?"

"It is understood," said Setlu.

"And it is understood, further," said Keshwan, "that Tshola shall deal with the lightning, bringing it from the sky?"

"Of a surety," said Tshola, growing more angry. "Is there a wizard that can bring lightning from the ground!"

"In truth there is such a wizard, and I am he!" exclaimed Keshwan, with a dramatic suddenness that electrified everybody. "You, Tshola, shall bring, if you can, that one thunderbolt of yours from the sky, where all men can see the lightning, and where small

wizards of no account play with it when they desire to frighten children! My thunderbolt shall I bring not from the sky, but from the bottom of the earth itself, and send it flaming into the heavens, there to eat up your lightning and perish your magic for ever and ever!"

The scorn in his words poured over and blistered old Tshola till that renowned fraud was consumed with fury.

"It shall be as you say, fool and boaster!" he shouted, while the councillors sat amazed, not knowing whether Keshwan was off his head and fooling them, or really intended the marvel he had promised.

"Five hundred thunderbolts!" screamed Tshola, with a wild laugh. "Lightning from the bowels of the earth! Ha, ha, ha! Prepare for your doom, O Dabazooki, braggart and windbag! And now, O chief, I would withdraw from the council and from thy presence till we meet at the place of trial, where surely this bladder of wind shall be pricked and stamped flat!"

With that Tshola flounced off in a rage, his bags, bladders, and bones rattling hideously; and the council broke up.

CHAPTER XXXIV

Tells how a plague of wizards descended on Setlu's kraal; how the rivals prepared their magic and Dabazooki offered his head; how Letika spoke a riddle in plain words; and how Napo stabbed his own heart.

FROM that moment till the time arrived for the trial, Setlu's kraal was a seething hive of commotion.

No sooner had the council dispersed than rumours began to fly around; and of course everybody who heard them added to them and passed them along with distortions. By-and-by, when they came back to the people who had invented them, they were so changed as to be unrecognisable. So the inventors sent them out again as brand new, and did it so often that before the day was over every man, woman and child possessed a separate version of what was going to be done at the trial.

Wherever the two wizards went they were followed by eager and curious crowds, till the thing began to be a nuisance. But Tshola made only a few appearances. He was said to be compounding a medicine which would split the heavens and the earth with the most frightful cataclysm, and would perish Dabazooki to the bone. He shut himself up in his hut, and a dense circle of onlookers packed itself around the door and waited there patiently for hours till he came out again. Tshola was really considerably worried how to produce the right sort of magic for blasting his rival, and kept mostly to himself in consequence. But Keshwan walked about the kraal, enjoying his notoriety, and was in high feather. No need to worry about *his* magic. Other people had charge of it, and would get everything ready the night before the fireworks. Then when they were let off, to

the wonder and astonishment of the whole world, he would not have to do anything bothersome, but would just take the credit and pretend to be modest over it. So he strolled about with an important air; and, if he so much as looked at anybody, that person was at once exalted to a high pinnacle of fame and envy, and had every right to become insufferably conceited. The people struggled around a good deal to be looked at by Keshwan, or to have a word with him. Those who could not get near enough to achieve this distinction, basked in the reflected glory of those who had, and were happy that way. Human nature has been the same in all ages.

Meanwhile messengers had been sent round the country-side as far as Letchla's kraal, summoning all the wizards, kraal doctors, rainmakers, and magicians of every type and all shades of professional ability. On the third day they began to arrive, and on the evening of the fourth day, when Gogoza and a few others put in an appearance, there was such a gathering of them as had never before been collected together in that land.

There were eight wizards of the first repute, eleven rainmakers, two specialists in cattle-plague, one whose forte was smallpox, with a side-line in deaths by drowning, twelve herbalists, six miscellaneous calamity-makers, and three who had themselves performed minor feats with lightning, but had a preference for cyclones, as being rarer and therefore safer to trade in! The rag-tag and rabble was made up of second-class assistants studying for their certificates in wizardry, a half-dozen or so of junior apprentices, and several general practitioners, who had hitherto displayed no great ability outside the ordinary ailments with which any plodding but conscientious doctor can afflict a community. Taken in the lump, it was calculated there was enough devilry and destruction concentrated at Setlu's kraal that day, to have blighted the whole world twice over if it was let loose in one paralysing blast.

The wizards were put in a reserved part of the kraal, and nobody was allowed to go near them because of the frightful danger.

The day of the great trial by lightning dawned, and

to the horror of Tshola it was cloudless. Moreover, though cloudless, it was cool. Never was there a day that seemed more unpropitious for thunderbolts. One might sooner have expected a tidal wave.

The colony of visiting wizards was early astir, and received accessions during the day from distant kraals. Sage speculation was indulged in, and every aspect of the sky was criticised, discussed, and weighed most thoroughly. As for the earth, nobody looked at that. Who in the name of wizardry had ever heard of the lightning arriving from *that* quarter? Dabazooki was without doubt insane, or hoaxing the whole faculty. It was, therefore, sincerely to be trusted, for the dignity and prestige of the profession, that Tshola would inflict upon this upstart at least one sound, orthodox thunderbolt which should smash his ridiculous pretensions into little pieces for ever and for ever.

Nevertheless, as the day wore on, some of the wizards grew uneasy. They made a great show of encouraging Tshola, but one or two hinted before dusk fell, bringing not so much as the shadow of a cloud with it, that Zulu magic, such as Dabazooki professed, was capable of strange things. Moreover, Keshwan had caused it to leak out that he was going to use for his magic a most curious and potent instrument never before seen in that land. This he had received in mid-air from a devil who had brought it to the roof of his hut in the dead of night, and had vanished thereafter in a sheet of flame. This report, getting around quickly, made Keshwan even more an object of fearsome curiosity than before, even among the wizards. Tshola affected to pooh-pooh the story when he heard it, but being himself as evilly superstitious as his silliest dupe, was secretly very much disturbed.

During the day Dwarf, Giant, and Bushman had several consultations in their hut, and Baroa explained carefully the arrangements which had been made. The train was to be fired at an agreed signal by the Griquas, who were still safely in hiding in the thick bushes on the parade-ground. Setlu, at the request of Keshwan, had given orders that nobody was to go near the ground chosen for the display. The chief, indeed, being anxious

to get rid of Tshola, and perhaps of one or two other nuisances, showed considerable solicitude for the success of the trial, and came himself to the hut to talk about it.

"Fear not at all, chief," said the Dwarf. "So well do I know who shall prevail to-night, that here before you all do I offer my head, to be hacked off by any that shall desire, I offering no resistance, should Dabazooki fail."

"And," said Keshwan enthusiastically, "not only my head do I offer if I fail, but every limb to be hacked off first, even my neck, then shall ye hack off my head!"

Setlu felt his confidence renewed, and longed for the hour of the trial to arrive.

It came at last; but despite the assurances of Dwarf and Giant, it brought for the former at least more than a qualm of uneasiness. For with it came Letika, swiftly and secretly, and drew the Dwarf to one side as the travellers passed out of their hut.

"Dwarf," she whispered, "there is more afoot to-night than the trial by lightning. The lives of many tremble!"

"Traitors there are, I know," replied Napo. "With such we shall deal shortly."

"Katego the Wolf has had speech with the prisoner, Dwarf. It will go ill with thee and with this kraal if Dabazooki fails."

"And ill with Katego whatever befalls," said the Dwarf grimly. "The prisoner shall be doubly watched."

"I myself will watch him," said the girl. "That they plot evil against thee is a surety. Ye may have need yet of one whom ye can trust, Dwarf, before the night is over!"

They spoke hurriedly, just for a second or two, and then separated. But not before Letika, saluting the Dwarf after a woman's fashion in that country, laid her hand lightly upon his head, then touched his palm with her lips. Napo felt in him as she did so a stranger sensation than he had experienced towards any woman. If it was not love, it was regret.

"Farewell, Dwarf," she said simply.

"Farewell, girl," he made answer; and added: "All such speeches from these lips as have stabbed thee, I turn now into mine own heart and with them I stab myself twice."

Then she was gone: and afterwards he was glad he had given her those words.

"What said that she-cat now?" asked Keshwan, as they hurried towards the place of trial.

"She said this, Giant: that he that would reach up and touch the stars might find sometimes a like Glory by stooping down, but that the feet of men so often stumble!"

"Then if she said that," responded Keshwan, with a growl, "she hath learnt well her lesson in the speaking of riddles that a man might utter till his jaws cracked and nobody would understand."

They said no more, for they had reached the parade-ground, and the hour for the trial was at hand.

There were stars in the sky—millions of them; and Tshola cursed them all. So far as he could see, there was not the faintest possible prospect of extracting even a pinch of thunder out of a sky like that. Tshola cursed Dabazooki too, from hair to marrow, but that did not help in the least. His only hope was that in the last resort Dabazooki would prove to be as big a swindler as himself.

But there was not much time now for hopes and speculations. Soon after dusk a great multitude began to assemble on the parade-ground, or rather on the slopes that surrounded it on three sides. In the centre of the ground were two circular enclosures constructed out of thorns piled up a couple of feet high. This was the Bushman's idea for hiding Keshwan's powder magazine. It was ordered by the chief that into one of these Tshola was to direct his thunderbolt when it came; from the other Dabazooki was to belch forth his fires. Each was, of course, sacred from intrusion all day. But that did not matter, for the magazine had been very carefully laid by the Griquas, and the fuses, made of grass soaked in fat, attached the night previous.

Keshwan also had an idea about these sacred enclosures, but it just missed fire owing to the obstinacy of

Tshola. He proposed that each wizard should take up his stand in the other's enclosure during the performance. Tshola would have agreed to this if he had had any faith in the power of his own magic to destroy Dabazooki. But in the circumstances, and being somewhat suspicious of the power of Dabazooki's magic to destroy *him*, he elected that each wizard should stay in his own enclosure. This did not suit Keshwan, who had a wholesome dread of his own magic that night. So a compromise was effected. The two wizards took up a position a few yards apart, but at a good distance from the enclosures. "For," said Keshwan, prudently, "it might otherwise be said that each bewitched the other, and so brought the trial to naught."

These arrangements and others of a preliminary nature occupied some time, and all the while the crowds were assembling. They flocked from many miles around, and the slopes of the hill were black with them. It was too dark to see how far they stretched back, or to estimate their numbers; but when Setlu, attended by all the councillors, took up his position to witness the trial, the salute that thundered out, and rolled down the hillside in an avalanche of sound, could not have come from less than ten thousand throats.

No sooner did the chief take his seat than Katego, being the oldest of the councillors, and therefore master of the ceremonies, rose up before the multitude and called out:

"O Bull that Thundered, all is now ready to begin! Shall the wizards dance?"

"Let them dance," said Setlu; and next moment there streamed on to the parade-ground as wild and hideous a collection of rag-tag impostors as ever the world had looked on. At first they could be seen but dimly. Then torches were brought—hundreds of them, with which boys ran here and there—and soon the wizards were beset by a belt of flame. The torches flared and smoked, and in the half-circle thus formed the wizards' dance began.

The whole congregation of tenth-rate doctors, fourth-rate humbugs, general practitioners, and calamity-mongers took part in it, and never before was such a

stamping of feet, such a waving of arms, or such a rattling of bones and bladders. As a dance it would never have passed muster on the variety stage, but a menagerie of epileptic monkeys would have turned green with envy on seeing it. The object of the dance was to see which of the wizards could work himself into the biggest fit or fall down dead of exhaustion soonest. When it had raged for about thirty-five minutes, and fourteen of the wizards were on the ground, foaming, the others saw they had no chance of winning and gave up the contest.

Then Katego stepped forward for the second time.

"O Bull that Thundered," he cried in a loud voice, "the dance is ended. Shall the trial begin?"

"Let the wizards come forth and the trial begin," answered Setlu; and instantly there fell upon the watching multitude a silence that could be felt.

CHAPTER XXXV

Describes the great trial by lightning; tells how Keshwan gave warning and produced a sign; how Tshola was overcome by Dabazooki's thunderbolt; why Napo thought the fight against Sekonyela was already won; and how an Owl fled from Setlu's kraal.

SLOWLY and with measured tread the rivals advanced before the semicircle of councillors and saluted Setlu. Tshola wore a terrifying array of plumes, jackals' tails, ratskin bags, and bladders, and he carried in his hand a wand. A slow gasp of awe and admiration went up when the people saw him. Keshwan, on the contrary, wore nothing but a girdle of pelts and on each arm a brass bangle. He carried in his hand no wand, but only the water-bowl and the bubble-blower he had found in the kraal of Zobonga. There was a murmur of surprise and disappointment. It seemed incredible and hardly decent thus to discard in public the professional habiliments proper to his art.

"The man is mad! He makes a mock of this trial," said somebody.

"Yet," rejoined another, "it is reported that he hath performed wonders no otherwise arrayed than he is now."

Katego stepped forward and the wizards stepped back.

"Hearken all people here assembled!" cried Katego, and went on to recite, with great ceremony, the origin of the trial, its terms, conditions, and limitations. This done, he commanded Tshola to come forward and named him before the people. A great roar of applause surged up out of the darkness. Napo looked round sharply when he heard it. There seemed to him to be a semitone in that wave of sound which dominated the massed

harmony for a brief moment, revealing depths of passion he had not suspected. He heard a voice in his ear—it was Ratlili's:

"Dwarf, trouble will come of this!"

"Doubtless," said the Dwarf, coolly. "But more trouble will come of another matter. See!" for just then, Katego having given the command, Keshwan stepped forward and was named to the people.

Instantly there swelled up another roar, sustained on a vibrant note of triumph and exultation which made Katego start this time. Quite evidently there were two factions in the crowd, and judging from the volume of sound that poured forth now, Keshwan was favoured by the majority. Tshola himself noticed it, and looked up at the starry sky with a gulp which almost choked him. But the time for the trial had arrived now, and he walked forth with a toss of the head and began.

The vast crowd of spectators watched fascinated. Tshola stood in the centre of the semicircle, facing the enclosure in which it was expected his lightnings would presently descend with devastating fury. He stretched out his arms to the heavens, waved his wand solemnly, lifted up his thin, piping voice, and commenced. He called on the spirits of the air, the monsters of the forest, the denizens of the rivers, and the familiars of the nether world. Then he danced furiously. His bones rattled and his bladders clattered, and in ten seconds he had become a whirling mass of rags and gimcracks and was perspiring profusely. Then he drew circles in the sand, emptied the contents of one of his bags and prayed over it, sprinkled the surroundings with some specially vile compound he had mixed for the occasion, and at last stood up, raised his wand again, and commanded the thunderbolt to fall. To the astonishment of the assemblage the thunderbolt took no notice. In the first trial Tshola had failed. He sat down and it was Keshwan's turn.

The Giant sat down in the semicircle with his bowl of water and his bubble-blower. Then he squeezed into the bowl some juice from the magic herbs Baroa had brought him. Next he inserted the bubble-blower into the water and offered up a prayer. This done, he spat

with great earnestness and precision, called on the spirits of his fathers to assemble and give him aid, and began to blow bubbles. The crowd, not one of which had ever seen a performance quite so mystical and terrifying, sucked in its breath with a long drawn "*Ah!*" and waited. There was enough fat in the water to make fairly big bubbles, and as each one appeared on the surface Keshwan paused, raised up his head, and cried out in a loud voice, naming it:

"Tshingbo!"—and that bubble burst.

"Matoola!"—and that bubble burst, too.

"Kakobaca!"—and another went out.

"Gogoza!" And so on, naming for each bubble one of the visiting wizards, who began to look a trifle uncomfortable. And for the last bubble he called out: "*Tshola!*" and stood up with a curse of such length and malignity as made that old fraud tremble to his toes. Then he stretched forth his arm, not to the heavens, but to the earth, and cried with a loud voice:

"Thunderbolt, Dabazooki calls thee!"

There was a pause of perhaps ten seconds, then Keshwan sat down. He had failed, and it was Tshola's turn again.

This time Tshola went through variations of his first performance, the feature of which was a double-barrelled curse which he ripped out at the head of Keshwan, blasting him for all eternity. Then he began praying to the spirits of the air again. He threw medicines around with a prodigal disregard for their death-dealing vices which made the crowd shudder. Then he danced himself almost to a standstill, wound up with another special and particular curse for Keshwan, and called sternly upon the thunderbolt. People on the hillside shaded their eyes to avoid being struck blind by the awful flash; but it never came. Tshola sat down, and for the second time Keshwan stepped forward.

But his next effort had no better result, notwithstanding he blew bubbles till his cheeks almost burst. The bubbles as they appeared were named this time after the birds of the air, the beasts of the field, and a grand assortment of calamities and diseases with which the whole world was to be afflicted unless that thunderbolt

came forth and exempted it. But still the thunderbolt stayed where it was; and now the people began to murmur.

Some of them laughed at Keshwan, and a few on the other side said disagreeable things to Tshola when his turn came again. This made Tshola seriously annoyed. The fact that Keshwan was making a grand failure of his own magic was no consolation; since, after all, if the strange wizard was proved by the trial to be an impostor, that did not relieve Tshola from the necessity of supporting his own reputation. In his next attempt, therefore, his curses covered a wider and more impartial range. He cursed the mountains, streams, and valleys, the sun, moon, and stars, the earth in sections and by the whole, and nearly everybody on it but himself. Next he flung at Keshwan such a hail of malice, such a deluge of malignant profanity, that he came within an ace of bursting a blood-vessel over it, then stopped short suddenly and in a grisly voice demanded the instantaneous appearance of that thunderbolt, failing which——

But it failed, nevertheless; and the perspiring wizard sat down amid something like an uproar.

Keshwan, calculating how long he could go on playing with a crowd in this temper, made his next attempt and failed also. When he sat down people were calling on Tshola from all quarters to be up and end the matter.

Tshola was in a fury by this time. He was in such a fury that he left out the dancing and devoted himself exclusively to the curses. It was said afterwards that no such curses had ever been heard in that land. A drought which began after the winter and lasted for seven months was attributed to some of them. They were of such length, breadth, and devastating ferocity, that the whole of that vast audience shuddered in sheer terror when they heard them.

But it was wasted energy. The stars looked down, twinkling as before, and there were neither sight nor smell of brimstone when Tshola, mad with rage, sat down with a rattle of bladders and a last imprecation.

Then Keshwan arose again, resolved that this would be the end of the matter. He made an elaborate prep-

aration of the bowl and the bubble-blower, and everybody could see that he meant business now, or must be a confessed failure for ever after. The bubbles as they appeared were named after his dead enemies and some that were still living.

"Vokwana!"—and the bubble burst.

"Tetwiza!"—and that one also.

"Kolwane!"—and away went that one.

"Maponda! Sekonyela!"—and these, too, went out.

Then he stood up with the bowl of water, holding it in both hands above his head, and cried out, so that all could hear, and his words carried to where Baroa and the Griquas waited in the clump of bushes:

"Hear me, O People of the Ox, before I now give proof of my wizardry!

"Know ye that this has been revealed to me by magic, that a great peril threatens the whole land, and that even in this kraal ye, O people, have enemies! Know ye that at this moment the soldiers of the Zulu assemble in vast numbers to invade the land, to attack the people, and to lay the country desolate! Here, at the Place of the Ox, the spirits will that ye give battle to the hosts of Chaka! Here by my magic this night I shall give sign to you, that if the People of the Ox heed my counsel, stand loyal to the chief, and fight beneath the shield of him that is called Dwarf, victory shall be theirs, though the whole earth is black with foes!"

His deep voice boomed out into the darkness and fell thrilling and vibrant on ten thousand pairs of ears. No one spoke and scarce anybody moved. Napo the Dwarf, noting the effect of the dramatic turn given to events, felt proud of his wit in devising it, and smiled in the darkness. Katego the Wolf smiled, too, but with no sense of satisfaction, for his heart was torn between fear and fury; and there were others with him in the throes of a like conflict. But these emotions found no expression in the tense hush that hung on every word falling from the Giant's lips. Setlu, noting it, too, gave thanks once again to those who had won him the victory over Tetwiza and now, he was certain, would sustain him against a greater peril. But Keshwan was still speaking.

"O People of the Ox, take warning! Prepare ye and be swift, for in but a little time the enemy will be upon you! Yonder"—and, as he stretched forth his hand, every eye in that vast multitude followed his pointing finger—"I hear the tramp, tramp of the Elephant and the bellowing of the Ox! I have seen blood! I have smelt it, and have tasted it! It is red and it tastes sweet, for it is the blood of enemies, and the whole earth swims in it! To you that would bathe with Setlu in the blood of his foes, I give a magic sign! See—as this bowl is dashed down and scattered and the water spilled, so shall the traitors in this kraal perish and their blood be sucked up by the earth!"—and with that Keshwan dashed the bowl upon the hard earth, and it was shivered into a thousand pieces.

The signal had been given.

Down by the clump of bushes where only the three travellers knew that the Griquas were in hiding, Keshwan saw a little spurt of fire run out merrily along the ground. The fuse had been lighted. It was not visible to anyone but himself. It came at first quickly, then it seemed almost to burn out, then it gathered again and crept forward along the fat-soaked threads of grass. But it moved slowly. The seconds dragged on, while all the multitude waited. Then suddenly Tshola, feeling the suspense of waiting, sprang up in a sudden fury of spite and hatred.

"Where is your vaunted magic, fraud and hypocrite?" he shouted. "Ha, ha, ha! fools can blow bubbles and children can smash bowls! Give us a sign, give us a sign! Look you, Dabazooki, boaster and windbag," and he rushed forward, "so much do I fear your magic that I go now to the place of destruction and defy your wizardry to harm me!"

With a loud and mocking laugh he strode forward in the direction of Keshwan's enclosure; and just then the fuse began to burn more quickly.

"Where is your thunderbolt, great wizard?" laughed Tshola, wildly and furiously. "Give us a sign, you mountebank and impostor, then shall we believe that this land is in peril as ye say, and all men shall obey you! See!—I stamp, I spit, I curse you and all your

magic!" With that he drew up, shaking with fury, almost on the spot where the keg of gunpowder was hidden under three feet of stones and rubble.

Keshwan, watching with all his eyes, saw the fire creeping, creeping along the grass-fuse, and he waited silently till it began to splutter. He knew then that it had reached the hole leading down into the hidden magazine. There was only a second to go now, and in it Keshwan did the thing which was to electrify every man of that mighty host into a frenzy.

Casting his arms above his head, he shouted in a voice of thunder:

"O People of the Ox, I give that sign! *Thunderbolt, come forth!*"

And in that very second it came forth.

It came with a rush and a roar, and an earthquake of splitting rock and blinding light that seemed to have riven the very world to its foundations. In the fierce glare of flame which shot upwards, old Tshola's black figure could be seen standing out for an instant, then it went up with the rocks. Keshwan himself went over backwards and got the worst fright of his lifetime. But it was nothing to the quaking terror that seized hold of the multitude. The fierce light fell for an instant on the vast concourse of faces massed around, and revealed them silent, gaping, horror-struck, paralysed with amazement, stunned by the roar of that deafening concussion. Then the light as suddenly went out, the flying rocks thudded to the earth, and from the heart of the dead silence which ensued there burst forth one long groan of anguish.

The next second everyone was scrambling this way and that, chief, councillors, soldiers, and wizards mixed up in a struggling mass. Women and children screamed, men shouted, officers gave commands which were not listened to, and the whole congregation of wizards capered and cursed.

The uproar was terrific! You could have offered those people a king's ransom in gold or diamonds, and not a man of them would have sat still while you counted it out to him. Nobody wanted anything so much as just to get away from there. And get away they did,

with such speed and energy that within five minutes of the explosion there was hardly a man of the whole multitude visible.

A few, however, stayed on the parade-ground through it all—stopped to talk over it, and congratulate each other on the gorgeous success of the entertainment. Keshwan, looking a bit shaky, for the explosion had shaken him up badly, was one of them. Napo the Dwarf was another; and Setlu was there, too, hardly knowing what to say, what with joy at being rid of Tshola and the rest of them, and awe at the magnificence of Keshwan's achievement.

"Henceforth, O Giant," he said, "you shall be the wizard of this kraal, and greatest in the whole land! For never was there a magic seen that could compare with this!"

"Chief," said the Giant, earnestly, "my bowl is broken and it shall be made whole no more. Henceforth I am a soldier only!"

"And for soldiers I bethink we shall have more need than for wizards shortly," said the Dwarf.

"Then if we shall need thy soldiers, Setlu," put in the Bushman, "we shall have to run far to find them, for some will put twenty miles between them and this kraal before sun-up!"

The Dwarf laughed.

"Nay," he said, "have no fear, they have heard the warning. When the soldiers of Chaka come, and Sekonyela with them, they will remember the sign which was given this night. Here comes one, at least, who shall stand true!"

It was Ratlali, and he came quickly.

"O chief," he said, "Maponda the Owl hath fled!"

CHAPTER XXXVI

In which the travellers make a forced march and Keshwan performs a new magic; the land is overrun by kind monsters and ferocious men; Sigwa contends that horses would be the better for having wings; and the invasion of the land begins.

It was quite true. Maponda had gone—how and when only the girl Letika knew, for she had gone too!

But whither they had gone was no matter of mystery to Napo.

"Now of a surety," he said, his nostrils dilating and his eyes growing bright, "Sekonyela and the hosts of Chaka will be loosed against us! Maponda hath fled to him under cover of these acts of magic——"

"Wherefore," put in Setlu promptly, "let Dabazooki here perform another that shall lick him up with flames ere he be gone a step farther!"

"Nay, chief," said Keshwan, rather shakily. "Enough hath there been of magic this night, else the whole world dissolve in fires and we perish with it! Against Sekonyela and the hosts of Chaka I will level only the lightning of my spear, if the Dwarf wills it. Nevertheless," and he turned towards Napo, "gladly would I lick up that girl with any magic that came nearest, since she hath betrayed us!"

"As to that," said the Dwarf, with quite unusual sharpness, "she it was that warned me this very night. Wherefore, as ye know, Setlu, I asked that the guards about the prisoner be doubled."

"They were doubled straightway," said the chief.

"And all that were there lie dead in the prison-hut," said Ratlali.

"Then others than Maponda had a hand in the matter," said the Dwarf. "But not the girl Letika,

Giant. She, I make no doubt whatever, was carried away by force and perhaps slain lest she gave us warning of what was afoot. Heed me now, Setlu, for time presses and there is much to do. Send messengers to the surrounding tribes and make ready. Summon the People of the Brand, who have long since promised their aid to me. Prepare the defences, and let the three of us follow hard after Maponda this very night, carrying word to one of whom the Bushman knows who will help us with strange and magical instruments; the which I know, for I have seen them. Then shall we meet Sekonyela and his hosts when we are ready, rather than that they fall on us unaware!"

"And I, chief, would go also," said the voice of Sigwa the Swift.

Thus in a few minutes it was arranged. Order had been restored somewhat when Sigwa commenced to get together a dozen or so of his swiftest runners; though it was noticeable that most of them had some diffidence about setting out in the company of Keshwan. A man that could root up the earth by the very bowels, and scatter it broadcast with flame and thunder, was of the sort to command respect. Crowds assembled for days around the hole his magic had made in the ground, or went as near to it as they dared. One man, wanting to explain the marvel to a visitor next day, fell in the hole and was instantly bewitched, a fact proved to all men; for was not his head magically cut open by a piece of jagged rock? He settled down at once to anticipate a whole year of personal misfortunes; and, as he married two wives before the time expired, the omen was fulfilled twice over.

The visiting wizards, before they returned home, scooped about in the vicinity of that hole for pieces of rock, which they carried off by the armful, just as we might carry away mementoes of any remarkable occurence. But they wanted them for another purpose than to put on parlour shelves or to hand over to museums. It is said, indeed, that for a generation after no piece of villainy was ever perpetrated for forty miles around which was not rendered more tellingly disastrous by the aid of these stones.

As for Tshola, he was from the moment of the explosion the saddest, lamest, and sorriest wizard who had ever infested the country. When he came down with the rocks he fell on a soft spot somewhere, which was fortunate for him. But his hair was singed, his left leg fractured at the thigh, and his chin scraped where he fell on it, and he was altogether so shaken up by the catastrophe that he was never the same man afterwards.

It was not far from daybreak when the three travellers and their escort set out. They took with them, unobserved, the two Griquas who had fired the magazine, and they travelled the road Baroa the Bushman had taken to the Mountain of the Mist. But, as it chanced, they were not destined to reach it. The Zulu invasion had begun already.

For two days they pressed on swiftly, hearing no word of the two fugitives. Then, striking across a low hill to shorten the journey by a mile or so, they came suddenly on a rabble of men, women, and children, moving swiftly. From these they learned that a vast army was pouring down already from behind the mountains and was beginning to devastate the land. Napo left them and hurried on. Later in the day they passed close to a deserted kraal, whence the inhabitants had fled. Thereafter they met stragglers from several tribes, and these told the same story.

The countryside was already in a ferment. Word had come down of an invasion, some said by Chaka in person, others said by Chaka's soldiers under a strange leader, who had with him ten thousand warriors—which figure was easily increased to a hundred thousand by the next informant. Others gave word of a new race which had descended on the land and was spreading destruction by means of magical appliances and monsters that struck dumb with horror all that beheld them. At this Baroa and the two Griquas laughed, but Napo dropped into thought for a moment.

"Methinks," he said, presently, "you, Keshwan, may have call to devise a new magic, else shall there be such to-do at Setlu's kraal, when the horsemen return with us, as will bring all our plans to naught!"

Keshwan growled that he had had enough of wizardry

and wanted war, but the Dwarf insisted. So a magic was promised in hearing of the soldiers, and it was this: that on a certain day he, Dabazooki, would summon by sorcery and incantation a number of strange and fearsome beasts, half animal, half man, which would come with him to do the bidding of Setlu and so save the land from the invaders.

When this was communicated to the soldiers, one of them was sent back to the kraal of Setlu to explain the matter there. Napo, who had seen horses ridden by the Portuguese, knew the panic that was awakened by the first sight of them. Baroa also knew it and had seen it at the Mountain of the Mist; and here in the country-side round about there was evidence of it in plenty. Many of the fugitives encountered, fleeing this way and that, were evidently more terror-stricken at the stories about these monsters than at the rumours of pillage and invasion. And, as events proved, the Dwarf's fore-thought was not thrown away.

On the very next day two soldiers, having been sent out as scouts while the company halted for a little rest and food, were observed suddenly to be rushing back as though possessed. In their wild haste to reach safety they had dropped shields and spears, and when they came up they were so speechless with terror that for a full minute neither could utter a word. Then at last one of them gasped out:

"Monsters and devils have we seen coming hither! O Dabazooki, we pray you make a magic that shall save us all from destruction!"

"Men that have two heads and a strange diversity of legs and breathe fire! We saw them!" gurgled the other. "Fetch up a thunderbolt I pray you, Dabazooki!"

And just then, coming round the shoulder of the hill, these two-headed devils appeared suddenly in view. There were a hundred horsemen at the least, riding slowly; yet, slowly as they came, they seemed to Setlu's soldiers the more terrible for it. Dust rose smoking from their four hundred feet, their hideous heads tossed and their nostrils snorted, their tails whisked in devilish merriment, and from their huge bodies, shaped like no

earthly thing, but obviously formed on the pattern of some dreadful nightmare, rose up what seemed to be horrible and only half-human forms, the mere sight of which was enough to curdle the blood of the very bravest.

Napo, watching the effect of these apparitions on the soldiers, realised that if a panic was to be averted, prompt steps must be taken. So he felled one of the scouts who was on the point of bolting, and seized the other by the ear.

"Fools!" he thundered, "would ye run howling because Dabazooki has performed this magic of which he told you? Know ye not that these monsters that come yonder have been called up by wizardry and enchantment, not for the undoing of this land, but for its salvation! Fools!" he roared in a fury, "say but a word, either of you, and Dabazooki shall by magic cause them to disappear instantly every one, and so leave the land helpless against Chaka's armies!"

Keshwan, who had never seen a horse before, and was shaking in every limb, licked his dry lips and tried to look as though he had known all along in what kind of speciality he was just then dealing. The prostrate scout picked himself up, and the man whose ear had been pulled out of joint, uttered a feeble "*Wow!*"

"Come, Giant," said the Dwarf, beneath his breath, "let us go forward and speak openly with these people, else will the soldiers take fright and leave us."

The Bushman went forward with them, he and the Dwarf boldly, but the renowned wizard looking uncommonly as though he was sorry he had done it.

Sigwa and the soldiers watched with bated breath, but the venturesome travellers bore charmed lives that day. At all events, they were not smitten with any visible affliction when at last they stood side by side with the leader of the horsemen, Witbooi himself. From him they learned a piece of startling intelligence, namely, that the armies of Chaka were already advancing rapidly along the valleys below the Mountain of the Mist. The Griquas had retreated, being too few in number, despite their guns, to offer resistance. They had had to run for it; and had run straight into a regiment which had

evidently made a detour and reached the neck of the valley by another rout. There had been a fight, in which a couple of the Griquas were assegaied, and one of the horses was killed. But many of the Zulus were slain, and this had evidently so incensed the regiment that a pursuit was in progress at that very moment.

As for Maponda, the Griquas could give no news. He had probably got into touch with Sekonyela already, and would now be in a position to guide the Zulus with the least delay straight for Setlu's kraal. Nor did they know anything of Letika, about whose whereabouts the Dwarf inquired earnestly. Indeed, they seemed to be troubling about very little, except an opportunity to escape from their pursuers, and if possible to exact vengeance of some sort for their losses in the fight. This being a favourable opportunity, Napo took it; and before long the Griquas had definitely thrown in their lot with Setlu against the Zulus.

"Wherefore," said Napo, "let us return at once to Setlu's kraal and await Sekonyela there."

So, with no more ado, the travellers and their escort turned their faces homewards, and with them went the latest manifestations of Dabazooki's devastating powers.

Keshwan, the first shock of surprise over, soon began to feel proud of the horses and the horsemen, and bragged about them. He had given up wizardry, it is true, and intended devoting himself exclusively to the profession of soldiering. Still, that could not make him anything but the incorrigible boaster he was. Had he not publicly announced that this feat of wizardry would be performed, and were not these monsters now visible in the sight of all men to prove it? Fearsome and hideous they might be, such being his intention when summoning them; for how else should the enemy be terror-stricken and made to flee? But look, soldiers, terrible and fierce as they were, how docile when he, Keshwan, stood by their sides and stroked them with his hands! Ay, surely, let a soldier or two come forward and touch them, and so bear witness that he, Keshwan, though summoning to the deliverance of the land creatures which for awesome terror were never exampled on this earth, yet caused them to be peaceable and of a

docile habit towards all such as were friendly disposed and meditated no hurt to the country.

Just then one of the soldiers caught a horse by the tail and was kicked nearly forty feet in consequence. This sobered down any wild curiosity to know more about Keshwan's monsters than could be learned by observations from a distance. But there was one item in the infernal outfit brought up from the shades by Keshwan which provoked unbounded speculation, and that was the guns. Neither Keshwan nor any man there, save Dwarf and Bushman—and of course the Griquas—had ever seen a gun used. But an opportunity was to come shortly.

The cavalcade—horsemen in front, riding slowly to accommodate their pace to that of the soldiers—moved across a swelling plain, ribbed with low, treeless hills and intersected here and there by dongas. The three travellers marched together, immediately behind the Griquas, and Sigwa marched with them. He could talk of nothing but the horses and the guns. He examined the horses critically; and by and by it became apparent that he was not altogether satisfied. He wanted Keshwan to elaborate and improve on the miracle he had wrought, and repair some omissions which, in his opinion, a really capable magician like Keshwan should not have overlooked. Possibly they were due to haste and some want of attention to minor details. But had he not considered how great utility would be conferred on these creatures by the addition of wings? Indeed, to any man, let alone a wizard of proved ability and understanding, it must occur that with wings they could rush hither and thither about the land, slaying their adversaries. Moreover, against such time as they alighted on earth again, would not the addition of four more legs to each monster give increase to their speed and terrifying qualities? Then, as to the omission of horns, these most assuredly——

"Peace!" expostulated Keshwan, sourly, for Sigwa's criticisms showed up his monsters as rather more ordinary than they might have been. "Had I summoned up but one beast thus equipped with these several things, all men would have dropped dead with fright,

and you first of them! Be content, therefore, with such magic as I have performed for the salvation of the land!"

But Sigwa was a persistent person, and hypercritical.

"It was a great magic, truly," he admitted, "and for this the thanks of all men shall be given you. Yet it seemeth that in such forethought as I have suggested you lacked somewhat, Dabazooki. And as for these instruments they carry, whence, as the Bushman tells me, death issues with a great smoke and sound——"

"As for these," broke in the exasperated wizard, who had only the haziest notion of their use himself, "if chatter you must about things which common people cannot understand, I shall order that demonstration be given of their death-dealing potency, whereafter there shall be no Sigwa left on the earth to prate till a man's head swims!"

As he said this, they reached the top of one of the low hills with which the veld was intersected, and Sigwa chanced to look back. The answer he was framing for Keshwan died on his lips at what he saw. For there, not more than half a mile distant, topping another rise and coming swiftly, was a regiment of plumed and kilted soldiers! The morning sunlight flashed upon their spears and gleamed on white shield and nodding plume. There must have been a thousand of them, if a man. One of the Griquas, riding a little way ahead, saw them at the same moment, and a shout went up:

"The Zulus!"

Instantly the cavalcade of horsemen broke, opened out fan-wise, wheeled to the right, and was covering the enemy with its guns.

Next moment both Sigwa and Keshwan had the fright of their lives, beside which even the explosion of the parade-ground paled. For, at a word of command from Witbooi, there shot out from over the heads of the horses a hundred sheets of flame, with a roll of smoke and a roar of sound that filled the earth with quaking terror.

"Look, look!" screamed the little Bushman; and suddenly, ere the noise had ceased to echo from the hills, they saw on the rise behind them full fifty writhing, staggering forms. The Griquas were fine shots, the

distance was not far, and every second bullet must have brought a man down, dead or wounded. A great gasp of wonder went up from Sigwa and his men. As for the reputed author of this marvel, he almost fell over on his back in his amazement. No such magic had ever been conceived by mortal wizard. It was really a long time before Keshwan could properly realise that by the powers of his own wizardry such a marvel had been accomplished.

The advance of the Zulus (who, be it said, knew something, from contact with the white man, about gun-fire and its consequences) was checked. The regiment, in fact, broke and scattered with a yell, not of terror but of rage. Then they closed up again and came on down the rise towards the others. But their advance was disastrous to themselves, for the Griquas, seeing themselves outnumbered by ten to one, poured another volley into the black mass of advancing savagery; and this time, so close was the enemy's formation, at least a hundred fell. Then Witbooi shouted a command, and the Bushman repeated it; and before the Zulus could re-form for the next rush, soldiers and horsemen were flying across the veld.

The fugitives pressed on all day, and the pursuers followed. Now and then a long shot was taken and a man dropped and was left to his fate, for no Zulu spared a thought for wounded men. But the advantage was with the guns and with Setlu's soldiers, made swift by the desperate necessity of reaching home in time to give warning that the dogs of war were loose. For, as they looked back on the second day, they saw, far off on the horizon, a black mass advancing swiftly and inexorably, and knew it for the advance-guard of the invasion.

There was no time now to talk of horses, guns, or magic. All through the night and the next day the flight continued. Now and then, when the distance between pursuers and pursued made the act possible, a brief halt was called for the rest of men and horses. Then the fugitives pressed on, and under cover of the darkness on the second night, Baroa guided them by a short path across the hills. It brought them at daybreak within sight of Setlu's kraal.

The Zulus were nowhere to be seen then; and, indeed, as events proved, they had given up the chase for the time being. But Napo knew that they were merely waiting for the army to come up, and that now the attack must be a matter of hours only. So, telling Sigwa to follow with his men, he and the Giant went forward to give warning and make such preparations as the time allowed for defence.

It was long after sun-up when, footsore and weary, they entered the Place of the Ox. Yet, tired as they were, they would neither rest nor touch food till two things had been done by Setlu's order. First, a message was dispatched to the People of the Brand, telling Letchla and his soldiers to come quickly. Then announcement was made to the people to prepare them for the coming of the horsemen.

That done, all was at once got in readiness for the attack.

CHAPTER XXXVII

The first fight of the invasion; how the Zulus advanced and were repulsed; how the Dwarf made a sortie; and how Qedini's Girls became men.

ALL that day the preparations went on feverishly, and far into the night as well.

The whole of the available population was put on to the work, including the women and boys. Stones were carried from the surrounding krantzes and added to the series of rough walls which looped the hillside in semi-circles. The cattle enclosures were strengthened, and a place was prepared where, at first sign of danger, the oxen could be taken for security.

It was while attending to this important detail the Dwarf was struck with an idea. Not far from the enclosures was a deep but narrow gully, a hundred yards or more in length, running parallel with the approaches to the kraal. To this gully Napo caused hundreds of bushes to be brought, and these were placed about the lip of the gully in such fashion as would give it the appearance of a water-course fringed with a natural growth of bush. Here, thought Napo, was the place, now ready to their hands, for an ambuscade; and he resolved that, as the spot must witness the first encounter with the enemy, there Qedini and his regiment of Girls should go.

Towards sundown scouts who had been posted on the surrounding hills came in with the expected news. The advance-guard of the enemy was in sight, but travelling slowly. The Dwarf, who knew something of Zulu tactics, had no fear of the place being attacked that night, and perhaps not for another day or so. In this he was correct. The Zulus invariably attacked at dawn, and usually their battles, so fierce and furious were they,

were won or lost before midday. But they were seldom lost. At that period of history no tribe or nation existed which was powerful enough to stem the devastating onrush of Chaka's armies.

Next day, with the first light, the advance-guard of the enemy was visible. It consisted of from six to eight thousand warriors, massed almost in a square on the slope of a grassy hill. There it rested throughout the day, evidently awaiting the arrival of the main body. Towards sundown the watchers noted a stir and movement, and almost at the same time the scouts came in again.

"The hosts of Chaka are drawing near, and they come swiftly," reported one.

"The land is black with them, they are like the locusts for multitude," said another.

But darkness had fallen before they appeared in view, and through the long hours of the night the defenders had to wait.

They did not wait idly. Qedini, at the head of his regiment, marched down to the ambuscade before midnight—a forlorn but heroic enterprise, sealed by death at its inception, from which out of five hundred men scarce a dozen emerged alive. The remainder of Setlu's army, numbering not more than six thousand all told, with the auxiliaries from the neighbouring tribes, was divided into two commands, one under the chief, and the other under Napo. They marched down the hillside and there separated, each division manning a half-circle of the lower stone walls. Between the two divisions was an extent of wall less than a hundred yards long, behind which Witbooi and his Griquas took their station. Here they were so situated that they could keep up a withering cross-fire on the enemy as he advanced, nor would it be possible for the defenders to be attacked without the Zulus coming within short distance of Witbooi's guns. If and when the enemy managed to rush the first defences, the Griquas were to retreat to the second wall and take up a position there. Here they would be supported in much the same position as before by the defenders of the second wall. The plan of operations was to be such that before the stronghold of Setlu

could be taken, each of the encircling walls would require to be captured, one after the other; and it was just before the first wall was attacked that Qedini's ambush was to fall to on the rear of the Zulu army.

With Napo went the Giant and those two captains of Tetwiza, Sigwa and Ratlali, who had sworn to fight at his side. They, with the three thousand or so warriors of the first division, took up their station behind the lower wall. Each, Keshwan and the two captains, had command of a regiment, and they were appointed to places where it was thought the fighting would be fiercest.

With Setlu and the second division behind the next wall were Katego and Nabomba, neither of whom was trusted to take part in the defence below, and with good reason, as will be seen.

Baroa the Bushman took his stand with the Griquas. He knew nothing about shooting, but they had shown him how to load a gun, and he felt more at home in their company. As a matter of fact, with the possible exception of Sigwa, still burning with unappeasable curiosity, nothing would have induced a man of Setlu's tribe to go near the Griquas. Even Keshwan was approached with diffidence. The man who could invent such monsters as those now guarded farther up the hill by a terror-stricken band of old men and boys, and could invest human beings with power to slay by no more than a sound and a puff of smoke, might be a great personage and a better friend than enemy; but still, he was henceforth no proper associate for common people. So Keshwan found himself saluted with great courtesy and respect, but otherwise let alone. As for Tshola, when he heard of his rival's latest magic, he resolved that that country was no place for him, and that he would emigrate on the very first day that he could walk.

The whole of the defending army was in position when Qedini and his Girls passed through the stone walls, and made for the ambuscade. They saluted the chief in the special manner that was invented in their honour by Napo; and, as they passed out, every soldier raised his weapon in his left hand, saluting in return. A soldier called out from somewhere:

"Farewell, Qedini! To-morrow all thy Girls shall be made spirits or men!"

"Farewell!" replied Qedini, knowing well that few if any could be expected to return.

Near the lower wall he encountered the Dwarf and stopped, saluting him.

"I give thanks, Dwarf," he said, simply, "for the great honour that is done my regiment this night! And you, Giant, having seen one ambush by which the Girls were brought to shame, shall see now another by which they shall achieve glory!"

So this regiment of youths and raw recruits, led by the youngest captain in the army, went on down the hill with a proud step, to measure itself against the fiercest soldiers among the armies of the world.

The long night wore away, and at the first streak of dawn the defenders, looking out across the mist-wrapped hollows near them, saw the vast army of invasion. And it was moving.

Never had any there beheld so wonderful a sight! The grey light of morning flashed down on a myriad nodding plumes and was flashed back by twenty thousand spears. The sloping hills before the kraal were black with men, whose limbs moved with a slow and peculiar rhythm as they advanced to give battle. The front of the oncoming army, stretching for three hundred yards or so, moved forward like a human wave, breasting each little rise and swallowing it, then pouring in a steady deluge of humanity down the slope and up the rise in front. Far as the eye could see in that light was an ocean of plumes, like the white caps on some monstrous black wave which was breaking on hidden rocks. All along the lines was the belt of ox-hide shields that glinted in the grey light, and over them the crest of tossing spears. A battle chant was going up—a murmur as of the sea heard in the distance, but growing louder, the wild, sonorous music of which fell on the ears of Dwarf and Giant and thrilled them. To be one of that splendid army, slow, inexorable, and victorious, would, thought Napo, be a joy worth living for; but to fight against it and achieve victory would be a prize for which a man might gladly die!

The soldiers of Setlu, massed behind their stone walls, watched silent and fascinated as this mighty host came on. At first the army of invasion advanced with a solid front only a few hundred yards in extent. Then suddenly it opened out on either side, putting forth two horns. In this manner the Zulus invariably attacked, the horns enveloping the enemy on two sides and possibly closing upon him in the rear, while the main body delivered a frontal attack, supported by the reserves. Each horn of the army numbered about five thousand men, and the attacking body in front another five thousand, leaving the same number in reserve to strengthen any point of attack if needed.

As the movement developed the reserves drew off a little to the right, taking up a position on a hillside whence the progress of the battle could be viewed. The horns elongated and spread out, drawing every moment a little nearer to where the defenders awaited the attack. But it was the centre brigade which moved quickest, and it was this section of the invading army which fell into Qedini's ambush.

This part of the operations was timed wonderfully well, and the stroke was of such daring as the invaders had seldom seen. The brigade, now separated from its rear supports, and of course severed from the two horns that were closing on the defenders, advanced swiftly past the clump of bushes where Qedini's men were hid. They were allowed to pass it and to reach almost within a spear's throw of the centre wall behind which the Griquas were crouching. Then suddenly, at a signal, Qedini's Girls leaped from their ambush and rushed on the enemy in rear. There was a roar of exultation along the whole line of the enemy when it was seen that the fight had actually commenced; but, not knowing the strength of the attackers, the Zulu advance wavered and stood still. Men in the front rank, hearing the sound of battle behind them, turned, and in a moment the brigade seemed to have swung half around. That was the right moment for the Griquas, and next second a sheet of flame and a roar of sound told that the guns had begun to play their part in the battle.

Instantly the slope up which the brigade was coming

was dotted with fallen forms. The attack was so sudden, so devastating, and so unexpected that the Zulus, not knowing who was striking them in rear, and staggered by this paralysing blow in front, broke in confusion and dismay. Half the brigade turned one way and half the other, and in this very confusion Napo saw an unexpected danger. If he was not prompt to drive home the blow first struck, the brigade would join forces on either hand with the advancing horns of the army, already coming perilously near. So the Dwarf shouted an order, and behold there poured across the stone walls, and rushed down the slopes upon the foe, more than a thousand of the defenders, bent on slaughter!

The Dwarf led them—led them straight on to the almost demoralised flanks of the brigade; and at the same moment another volley poured into the enemy's ranks from the Griquas' guns. It was a short, sharp sortie, in which the enemy, bewildered at the suddenness of the whole thing, was driven back, fighting, it is true, but in wild confusion. Napo, however, did not drive them far. He knew well the impossibility of giving battle in the open against such numbers, so, the first blow being struck, he retreated up the rise, and was only just back in position behind the wall, short by perhaps fifty or a hundred killed, when the attack fell upon him.

Meanwhile everyone had seen what fate befell the regiment of Girls, and a great shout went up from Setlu's soldiers as they saw it. Qedini, leading his forlorn hope, fell with a sudden fury on the rear of the brigade, who went down by a score or more before the Zulus had recovered sufficiently from their surprise; then that part of the brigade swung round, and the fight became general.

Qedini's regiment fought with the rage and fury of wild animals. The object of the attack was to prevent the centre brigade from joining forces with the two horns of the army in the general assault which was now imminent, and in that purpose it succeeded. The object Qedini had personally in view was to hew his way through the brigade and rejoin the defenders behind their walls, and in that he failed. But he got a long way towards success; for the defenders, watching the progress

of the fight, saw presently that the centre of disturbance had shifted from the rear of the brigade and reached its heart. There, on a little mound, they witnessed the heroic stand which is to this day told of in the traditions of the people.

Three hundred of Qedini's soldiers were dead before the mound was reached, and twice as many of the Zulus. The fight, however, went on with unabated fury. Every man of the little force was desperately wounded, yet not one so much as thought of surrender. Flight would have been impossible, had they wished it, for they were surrounded by overwhelming numbers. So they stood where they were, back to back, hacking and stabbing, and at every blow a man went down dead or dying, while the living fought on amongst the corpses.

Once in the excitement of the battle, Qedini, looking for an instant across the sea of fierce faces and stabbing spears that hemmed him in, waved a signal to the defenders behind the walls. Its answer was the second volley and the charge of Napo's men; and, behold, the ranks of the enemy wavered and parted. Then Qedini and his men gave a wild shout, and the next moment they had hurled themselves once more into the body of the brigade and were fighting their way through.

The onlookers saw no more of that fight save one thing, for, just as the demoralised brigade swept round to gather itself together and re-form for a fresh attack, there sprang from its ranks twenty men fighting as they ran. One of them was Qedini himself—staggering from a score of wounds, his body dripping blood, his face wild with fury and excitement, his shield gone and his spear broken in that fierce charge through the ranks of the foe. There was no time to rescue him before the end came. Napo saw it, and gave thanks that a man should die thus with his face to an overwhelming foe.

Someone struck out and Qedini, fighting even with his broken spear, went down to rise no more. Of the twenty that had fought their way through the brigade, almost half were slain at the same moment, but about a dozen, wounded in every limb, so covered with blood that they could scarce be recognised as men, managed to reach the shelter of the wall and so returned to safety.

A great roar of welcome went up from Setlu's army as they staggered in through the gap in the stone wall, and once more every man of the regiments gave the salute to Qedini's Girls.

The ambuscade had served its purpose. As the brigade drew off to re-form it was seen that the dead lay in heaps where the fighting had been fiercest. That was not all. The enemy had been taught at the commencement of the battle that victory, if it was to be won at all, must be purchased at tremendous cost. And that lesson had its effect on both attackers and defenders.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

Of the great battle at the Place of the Ox; how the Dwarf saw Sekonyela and flung a challenge; how the Wolf went down snarling; how Keshwan performed a last magic; and how Letchla's promise was fulfilled.

THE attack on the centre brigade of the invading army stemmed the tide of battle only for a few minutes. Indeed, it was scarcely over before the right horn of the enemy came in touch with the defenders under Napo. At the same instant the centre brigade moved forward also, and the general attack began.

There was no child's play about the fighting now. All along the line of the semicircular wall the battle raged. The defenders fought with a desperation and fury worthy of that band of heroes which had gone down, face to the foe, in the first onslaught, and enormously outnumbered as they were, there were two points to their advantage—the shelter afforded by the stone wall, and the fact that the enemy was forced to charge upwards and to climb a barrier in some places eight feet high before the position could be taken.

Yet charge they did, with such magnificent ferocity that even in the first rush hundreds of them leaped upon the wall, to be beaten back or stabbed. Many, indeed, leaped over and were there brought to their end.

But the position was not to be taken at the first assault, and presently the Zulus fell back here and there. One regiment, endeavouring to force the wall where Keshwan fought, lost almost a third of its men, most of them speared and assegaied while in the act of climbing over. Farther along the line the same thing happened to another regiment which was caught between the weapons of the defenders and the fire of Witbooi's men. The two

regiments drew back—not to retreat, but to re-form; and, after a moment's check, the second assault began.

To Baroa the Bushman, watching from his position with the Griquas, the sight seemed a superb one. The vast army of plumed and kilted Zulus surged onward like a slowly gathering wave which at first crept forward, then seemed suddenly to rise up like an ocean billow, paused for an instant on the crest, and finally burst in a great cataract of tossing plumes and gleaming spears.

For a moment it seemed to Baroa that the whole wall was submerged and the position taken. Then he saw, out of the confusion of leaping, stabbing forms, that men everywhere were being forced back from the defences, that rivulets of blood were running amongst the brown stones, that attackers and defenders were fighting in death-grips half on the wall and half over it, and that slowly but surely the onslaught was being repulsed and the position held. He saw this through the swirl of smoke from the Griqua guns, and above their roar he heard the shouts of the two armies, the clash of weapons as the fight swayed back and forth along the line, and the shrieks of the dying and the wounded. Then suddenly he was conscious that the tension of the attack was relieved, and next moment he saw that the second charge had failed.

But now it was evident, also, that the defenders, despite their victory of the moment, could not hope to hold the position long. Their losses had been severe. Of Ratlali's regiment almost half were slain, and of Sigwa's about the same, the fighting having been fiercest at the points where they commanded. Moreover, curiously enough, the losses of the enemy, though infinitely greater, were now to be turned to account against the defenders, for the dead lay heaped so high against the wall where it was lowest, that by leaping upon the piles of corpses the Zulus could certainly carry the position at their next attempt.

Napo saw this too, and, knowing the utter hopelessness of stemming a rush when once the attacking regiments were across the wall, gave orders to his men to retreat. All this while, in accordance with the Dwarf's plan, not a sign had been visible of the remainder of

Setlu's army behind the second wall. There, sheltered by the stone semicircle from five to eight feet high, nearly three thousand soldiers lay hidden and ready, of whose very existence the Zulus were unaware.

The distance between the two walls was not more than a hundred yards, but the way was steep. In a few moments the first wall and the space behind it were entirely deserted. The Zulus, when they saw what was happening, gave a shout of derision and triumph. Then a herald stepped forward, climbed upon the lower wall, and cried aloud:

"All men, listen! Chaka the King hath commanded that those surrendering shall go free, if they give up their weapons, all their cattle, and the women. He hath spoken!"

The answer to this insult came from Napo the Dwarf. Leaping upon the wall in front of him, he called out:

"Tell us first, herald, if Chaka the King is with his army in person?"

"Nay," said the herald. "The king speaks through the mouth of Sekonyela!"

"Then go you back to Sekonyela," replied the Dwarf, "and tell him that before Setlu surrenders to such as he, the heavens shall fall and the world perish!"

So the herald, with a laugh and a swagger, went back. And it was then that the Dwarf saw Sekonyela for the first time since that other battle long, long ago, when he lost his Golden Glory. For there, advancing to meet the herald, came a tall man, proud of poise, great of stature, splendid in the beauty of his physique: a savage Apollo, decked out in the trappings of Mars. The sunlight rippled upon his shiny skin and glanced back from the spear he carried. Upon his head was a busby of white sheep-skin, crested with black feathers. From the right shoulder to the left hip was a leopard-skin, and around his loins was a kilt of cows' tails. Elbows, wrists, and knees were tufted with sheep-skin, and on legs and arms were glittering brass bangles. He carried an immense shield of white ox-hide, and was altogether a splendid and dazzling figure.

The Dwarf watched in silence as Sekonyela received

his answer from the herald. Then he called out across the distance:

"I, Napo the Dwarf, await you, Sekonyela, traitor, thief, and murderer! Come forth, if you dare, and fight me singly, and let the battle hang on that issue!"

There was a shout of approval from Setlu's men when they heard this. But Sekonyela called back, with a laugh:

"First shall I stamp this place flat and strew the earth with the dead bodies of your people! Then, if we live, I will fight you singly, baboon and boaster!"

He turned to the regiments as he spoke, giving a command, and once more the advance began.

The hosts of Sekonyela poured over the deserted wall like a cataract.

The slaughter in this attack was even more severe than in its predecessors. For one thing, the second wall was higher than the first owing to the steepness of the ground. Moreover, the Griquas were so situated that they could rake its whole length, ploughing the massed ranks of the enemy with a perfect storm of bullets. Men who fight nowadays, with rifles at long range, and frequently expend a hundred rounds on the killing of one mule, can hardly credit the devastating effect of gun-fire on a packed and seething mass of humanity, at such short range that some of the victims were blackened with the powder. Not a bullet failed to kill or wound somebody, and generally from three to five men went down dead or dying at each shot. Witbooi, who had seen fighting in the border wars on the side of the Cape Dutch, captained his men well, and had taught them volleying. In that attack alone fully three hundred of the enemy fell to his guns.

As for the hand-to-hand fighting along the wall, spear and assegai told an equally bloody story. Hundreds of Sekonyela's men were stabbed as they sprang on the wall, and fell back into their own ranks. Others were dragged over and speared; while in one corner the defenders, snatching up boulders from the wall itself, rained down upon their enemies such a fury of blows that not a man in that quarter scaled the defences at all.

But the attackers were not easily defeated, and the

fight raged on. Indeed, it seemed from sheer weight of numbers the position must presently be carried, had not the Dwarf decided on another sortie. This he entrusted to the man Pitsi, whose life he had given to him at the slaying of Tetwiza. A body of about five hundred men, veterans mostly, who had fought in the defence of the first wall and were now rested, was ordered to turn the left flank of the enemy. So fiercely engrossed were the Zulus in the attempt to scale the wall that they did not perceive the movement till too late. Pitsi led his men round to the rear of the Griquas' position, passed out of the lines there, wheeled suddenly, and threw his force furiously on the enemy's left.

Instantly a shout went up—"Another ambush!"

Men turned this way and that on hearing it, doubtful as to the direction of attack, and fearful of being trapped between the two walls, which, indeed, many of them were. The space between them was too narrow for the enemy to wheel round and repel this assault, and at the same time keep up the frontal attack on which their success depended. Half the attackers swung round one way and half the other. There was uproar and confusion, the shouting of contradictory commands, a surging this way and that of great masses of men; and presently, behold, the lower wall was black with leaping forms! The assault on the second wall had failed, and the Zulus were retreating.

Pitsi and the remnants of his force (for he had lost heavily) returned with a shout of victory. They came, picking their way between the heaps of dead that strewed the ground everywhere; and, looking up, the young captain beheld a sight which startled him. From that end of the wall where the regiments under Katego and Nabomba were stationed, he saw men pouring out, the Wolf leading them. At first he supposed another sortie had been ordered; then he looked round, as a yell of rage came up from the defenders behind the wall. The Dwarf, seeing at the same instant what was afoot, sprang up and shouted:

"Katego the traitor deserts to the enemy!"

Pitsi heard that shout, and Katego heard it. The next moment a race began, Katego and some three hundred

of his men for the lower wall, and Pitsi with two hundred to intercept them. Nabomba ran, too; but, coward that he was, deserted the deserters, and ran back to the shelter of his own wall. Here Ratlali met him—met him face to face, and, with eyes blazing contempt and fury, hewed him down. He sank to the ground, scarce uttering a groan. Thus was a half of that treachery dealt with!

Meanwhile Katego reached the wall just as Pitsi, with his depleted regiment, hurled himself upon the deserters. Strangely enough—such were the swift and revolutionary changes of that time—Pitsi's regiment, now fighting for Setlu, consisted chiefly of Tetwiza's soldiers who had fought against Katego while the Giant was attacking Sigwa's men on the rock-strewn kopje. Here, then, was good occasion for the paying off of old scores, and Tetwiza's soldiers took it.

The fight was among the sharpest and fiercest of that day of fights and slaughter. It was also the shortest. Some of the deserters, it is true, gained the wall and scaled it, but not many. The rush of Pitsi's men forced most of them to the wall, and here, with their backs to it, they fought and were hewn down. Katego, his red lips parted in a snarl of fury, fought longest. But Pitsi had marked him down, and presently came at him with spear aloft. Katego saw him coming and turned in a wild endeavour to scale the barrier and save himself. He was, in fact, half on the wall, and within an ace of preserving his miserable carcase from a just retribution, when his foot slipped in the blood that besmeared the stones, and he fell. He fell backwards, throwing up his arms wildly—and fell, as fate would have it, right on to Pitsi's uplifted spear. It passed through his back and stuck out a full foot or more from his chest, so that Pitsi had some ado to withdraw it.

"So perish all enemies and traitors!" cried the Dwarf, watching from the wall; and that cry was wafted down to the Zulu lines, falling upon Sekonyela's ears.

The next thing Napo was aware of was that the almost demoralised army of invasion was re-forming to renew the attack, and that this time it would be reinforced by the reserves. Obviously the last effort was to be made.

Napo looked along the length of the stone wall, glanced across the open space, where Pitsi was again picking his way, but with fewer men this time, and saw everywhere the heaps of slain. The number of the defenders was reduced by this time to almost half, while the enemy would be reinforced by at least five thousand men. The odds were desperate; so desperate that only the arrival of help from Letchla could turn the scale now. That help was already overdue. Would it come before the Zulu horde had taken the last barrier and had put all in Setlu's kraal to the spear and assegai?

"At the least, Giant," said Napo, for the two were standing together, "if we go down we shall go down fighting! Unless," he added, whimsically, "there is some magic left over from your store of marvels to preserve us!"

"Methinks," said Keshwan, suddenly struck with an idea, "there may still be potency in that fire-sand, and our next thunderbolt may do more than break the leg of an old wizard! Quick, now! Order that the soldiers be withdrawn to the third wall. Under cover of that movement, Baroa and the two Griquas who aided in the last magic shall prepare the same here, so that those crossing to the attack shall tread on the thunderbolt, and let loose destruction upon themselves!"

The next few minutes were vital to the defence. Fortunately the enemy took some time to form up for the attack. This sufficed for the magazine to be laid under the wall, in such fashion that a man crouching within its shelter could apply to it the spark that would blow some dozens of Sekonyela's warriors into eternity and demoralise a good many more. That the man to apply the spark would go up with the rocks and the soldiers, and take no further interest in the proceedings, went without saying. And it was one of the Griquas who volunteered to do it.

Everything was ready when the advance began again. Setlu's soldiers were ensconced behind the third wall, and from that place of vantage Dwarf and Giant saw all that happened.

The enemy advanced cautiously this time. Defenders

behind stone breastworks deserved respect, and nobody was quite sure where another ambush might be laid. So, as the first walls were approached, scouts were sent forward, mounted them, and signalled back that the ground was clear. They did not see the waiting Griqua crouching behind the second wall in a small abutment which sheltered him from view.

The hosts of Sekonyela came on, swarmed over the first wall, crossed the open space with a rush of feet that roared like thunder, and burst over the second in a torrent of black humanity. Napo, watching as they came, saw them pause, as though gathering strength for the rush forward. That pause was fatal; for next moment there was the roar of a terrific explosion, a spout of smoke, earth, and stones leaping heavenward, and the dense mass of living units was hurled in twain almost as though cleft by the solid blade of some giant's axe! A great gasp of fear and wonder rose up from the watching army behind the wall. Then came a cry somewhere:

"Letchla comes! Letchla comes!"

It was Keshwan who raised that shout, and its effect was magical. As though at a given signal, the soldiers of Setlu leaped upon the wall and over it, and next moment they were pouring down the slope into the seething mass of panic-striken Zulus. Round the shoulder of the hill swept the army of Letchla, two thousand strong, racing like bloodhounds upon the trail.

The Zulus were caught in a trap, the wall behind them, Setlu's warriors in front, and the reinforcements hurling themselves on the left of the stricken army. From the right, too, came a withering fire from the Griquas, so that men went down like corn before the wind, to mingle their blood with the victims of Keshwan's magic.

Ten thousand warriors met together at that moment in the shock of battle, and to this day the last fight of the Zulus is told of in the land. Desperate, mad with rage, knowing themselves trapped and expecting no quarter, the enemy fought with a fury beside which the other combats of the day paled into insignificance. Twice it seemed as though they would beat back their

assailants and even yet achieve the victory. Twice the warriors of Setlu swayed and broke, and those of Letchla were driven back, but each time the voice of the Dwarf on one side, and of Meputu on the other, rang out a rally above the din of strife.

Once, when this happened, Napo, looking beyond the masses of struggling men, caught sight of Sekonyela. He saw his old enemy so clearly that there could be no mistaking him—and he ran! Down the slope of the hill Sekonyela went, swiftly as a dog coursing. Then Napo, hemmed in from pursuing him by the press of fighting, laughed aloud in the scorn and fury that possessed him.

"Sekonyela flees!" he cried. "Run, too, soldiers, and tell the great Chaka your leader deserted you!"

Then came the last stroke home, by the horned bodyguard of Setlu.

For suddenly, as the Zulus seemed to be gathering themselves for a final and supreme effort to burst through the sea of raging humanity that surged about them, a cry rang out and swept along the whole line:

"Fly, fly, devils are upon us!"

Devils they were in truth, if appearance went for anything, for a more terrifying charge than that of the bodyguard was not seen in the whole battle. Setlu himself was at the head of them, and round and about him came a whirlwind of monsters, the light gleaming upon white horns and glittering on stabbing spears.

The Zulus met them in a clash of spear on shield that rolled and thundered. Mingled with it came hoarse shouts of command, the tread of feet, yells of despair and fury—all this rising and falling in a roar that presently grew strong, thrilling, and imperative, and at last broke forth in a wild shout of victory!

The Zulus broke, scattered, turned and fled!

CHAPTER XXXIX

In which the travellers set out upon their last adventure.

THE fight was over and the day was won!

Napo, standing amongst the piles of dead, with the ranks of the living grouped around, looked forth upon the plain below and saw the fleeing remnants of the invading army.

A great fight, truly! The earth soaked, and the very stones slippery with blood; the ground black with corpses, piled up in heaps, with limbs interlocked in an unnatural and fantastic tracery; the soft breeze, so cool now all was over, stirring a thousand plumes that would wave no more in the pride of battle; the clear sky looking down on hundreds of upturned, grinning faces. It was a great fight, meet for brave men, and befitting a savage conquest.

Yet as Napo, his soul mixed so strangely with war and dreaming, looked down and beheld it all, there was for him neither joy nor triumph in what he saw. Round and about him stood many who had played heroic parts that day—old men and young, all wounded, some almost to the death, their bodies streaming blood and sweat, their shields torn, their weapons broken, yet victory exulting in their hearts and blazing from their eyes.

Setlu, the chief, stood by the Dwarf's side. He, too, had fought fiercely and was wounded; yet, with simple chivalry, he turned to the Dwarf, wiping his blood-stained spear, and said:

"To you, Dwarf, we give thanks for this victory!"

Then, raising his voice so that everyone might hear, he cried out:

"Soldiers of the Ox, this day there are two kings amongst you!

"To me, your chief and father, ye give homage always, and to none other may the royal salute be given. Yet do I command that once, and once only, do you salute as king this warrior who hath given us such victory as shall make us henceforth a great and mighty people! O Dwarf, King of Soldiers, we salute thee!"

He raised the weapon in his hand, and there burst forth from every throat a thrice-repeated roar that swept across the hills in a very tempest of acclamation; and every spear was thrice raised and lowered.

The Dwarf stood speechless, and seemingly not aware of what was going on, till the volume of sound crashed down and died away. Then out of the silence which hung upon his words, his voice came up hoarsely and heavily:

"O chief and people, for this great honour I give thanks. Yet in the hour of your victory, the which was accomplished not by my poor wit or feeble spear, but by the fury and valour of the soldiers—in this hour I must bid you farewell, and leave you! I am beckoned hence, O people, by the same hand which called me hither. Nay"—and he made a gesture, for Setlu, astonished and dismayed at what he had heard, would have spoken—"nay, O Setlu, it is decreed so, and this very day I journey on with swift steps towards my Glory. Friends," and he turned to where Giant and Bushman stood silently at his side, "as ye well know, my Golden Glory abides not amongst these slain, but yonder in the Mountain of the Mist. Death, too, perchance awaits me there. That I know not; but if such is ordained for me, for you, at least, there shall be life and honour amongst these people if ye will but tarry here."

The Giant looked at the Bushman, and the Bushman at the Giant. Their glance was a puzzled one. Baroa touched his head with his finger-tips.

"Dwarf," said the Giant, in a tone of perplexity, "do you in very truth hold that this Golden Glory, of which we have so often heard, calls you to follow now?"

"In truth do I believe it and know it, Giant! Have I not pressed on always on this quest? Follow I must now!"

"Then, though we have fought hard and are very weary, we will follow with you to the end," said Keshwan, simply.

"Nay, friends," replied the Dwarf, with a smile; "what call is there for you, having fought so nobly, to surrender your rest and follow after this quest of mine? Better that ye stay here, having well earned ease and reward from these people."

"Dwarf," said the Giant, slowly, "think you that to such as have passed through great peril at your side, and have fought with you, shoulder to shoulder, insult should be offered in return?"

"And think you," snapped out the Bushman, "that even a kraal dog shall be driven away masterless without returning to the footsteps of him that kicked him?"

"Nay," said the Dwarf, his words rising so thick in his throat he could scarce utter them, "nor do I think there is love and affection greater than yours in the heart of man, O Giant and O Bushman! Come then, old friends, if so ye will, to the end of this journey, for now I follow after Sekonyela. Let us go quickly!"

But here Setlu, astonished by this sudden resolve of the Dwarf's, began to plead.

"Stay with us, at the least, till your wounds are healed," he begged. "See, even the Bushman here has been touched with a flying spear. As for you, Dwarf and Giant, how shall ye journey with such hurts and in the weariness of great fighting, the which shall be well assuaged if ye will stay for a little while?"

"As to this kraal dog that follows at my heels," said the Dwarf, smiling, "his wound will be the sooner cured by travelling and fasting"—whereat Baroa indulged in a hideous grimace. "And for me and the Giant here, Dabazooki shall make a magic that shall cause our scratches to be whole again."

But Setlu the chief persisted.

"Reason you with him, Dabazooki," he said, earnestly. "Shall there not be glory for him in the command of my army; or for you in the making of

great wizardries? Why then depart thus, bereaving my people, and yourselves inviting dangers and perhaps death?"

"Because, O chief," said Napo, and once more Giant and Bushman exchanged glances, "there is a Golden Glory that haunts the dreams of men! It is found in war by some, by others in wealth and herds. Some find it in the love of women, many in chieftainship and high honours, others only in food, drink, and carousals."

"And for you, Dwarf, where can glory lie, if not in any of these things for which the heart of a man yearns?"

The Dwarf, leaning upon his spear, stretched out his hand, and his face lit up with a smile which was almost transfiguring.

"My Golden Glory lies in that which ruleth the soul of a man, be he great or small, high or lowly! Such glory I came hither and I pass hence to seek! Stay me, then, no longer, great chief of a people that in days to come shall achieve nationhood and rule over all this land! I came hither bringing peace here and a sword there. Let me now pass swiftly, none hindering, so that in my coming and my passing there may be a lesson for thee and for those that come after thee!"

Setlu, his brows furrowed and perplexed, looked into the Dwarf's eyes sadly.

"To these riddles that ye speak I can find no answer, Dwarf," he said heavily. "Yet if go ye must, go, as ye say, swiftly, for my heart turns to water and my knees are loose with sorrow! Fare ye well, Dwarf, Giant and Bushman! Perchance in that hour of achievement, if Death and thy Glory are linked in one, our hearts here, remembering thee, shall know it, and the lesson will be learned and the riddle solved! Farewell!"

He turned from them, covering his face with his hands according to custom, so that he might not see them go; and together the travellers left him.

Not a sound was heard as they marched from that stricken field.

Down the long ranks of soldiers they passed silently and slowly, their shields raised and their spears aloft in a last salute. Every head as they passed by was turned and every face covered; and thus strangely and solemnly they set out upon their last adventure.

CHAPTER XL

How the three travellers pursued their last journey together; how Fate overtook a traitor, and a foul blow was avenged; how Love made a bridge for a man's feet; and how Golden Glory shone upon a dying girl.

OF that journey Keshwan, who told the story, lied as was his wont. The tales that were spread about it round the kraal fires of a hundred tribes, and are still told in the huts of that nation which sprang from them, are in consequence somewhat legendary and mythical. It occupied variously two days and two weeks, and even extended to a year when some ingenious falsifier could invent incidents enough to last out that period. It was concerned also with great fights belonging to periods of history that preceded it by a century, or followed years after the travellers were dust and ashes. But that did not matter. Perhaps even in this history, truthful as it is (in the main), there have been some chronological dislocations in places, which is not the fault of the historian, but lies to the charge of people with no text-book accuracy, their dates being fixed generally by some such incident as the death of a brown heifer or the stripping of a mealie-field by a hailstorm.

It was concerned, further, with single-handed combats with marauding Zulus, in which Keshwan, of course, achieved prodigies, and performed wizardries of such magnitude that not even the slaying of two hundred and twenty-seven thousand Zulus by one thunderbolt (as already recorded) could come near them for devastating ferocity.

On three points, however, the legends, rightly or wrongly, seem to agree:

First, that from the battle at the Place of the Ox the

people now known as the Basutos grew up to nationhood. How they came by their title may be told in another story, for in that also Keshwan the Giant had a hand. After the battle the people of Setlu and Letchla made close alliance, ruling each over a vast tract of territory, which two were eventually amalgamated. How the chief who succeeded to the rule of these tribes came by his power, and built up a great race, is a matter too long for description here. There was a white man in the story, and he has written it all down, so perhaps some day the world will have it.

Secondly, that the Griquas who helped Setlu to overcome the Zulus stayed in the land, and did not accompany the travellers. They taught Setlu and his people many things, acclimatised and bred horses, for which the Basutos are now famous, and gave instructions in the use of firearms, which the Basutos have put to good use since—and to bad use, sometimes. They were a people of resource and daring; and the fact that, from being monsters before whom all men fled, they developed very soon into human beings and their dragons into beasts of burden, was only strange as affording further proof of the power of Dabazooki's magic.

Thirdly—and here we get back to the details of this history—that Napo the Dwarf, when he reached the summit of the Mountain of the Mist, was wounded almost to the death, the manner in which he came by his sore hurt being agreed upon by all commentators as follows.

In the late evening of a day—a week, a fortnight, or a year—following the battle just narrated, the travellers reached that valley at whose head the Mountain of the Mist raised up its bush-clad slopes and its great tower of bare rock above them. Dusk was falling about the valley, but, though travel-stained and weary, they pressed on. Twice in the cross-country dash to intercept the fugitive they had come almost within arm's length of capturing Sekonyela. He had passed by, taking a straight line for the valley, and had begged food at a group of huts. Here the pursuers had word of him. Evidently he was aware, or could guess, that

pursuit followed him, for he stayed neither to rest nor to eat, but ran on like a hunted buck.

"He is gone scarce two hours," said a woman that told them this, offering to give them food and shelter.

"Nay," said the Dwarf. "Though we are weary, and like to drop, he also must be in the same case. Therefore if we press on we shall overtake him."

"Doubtless," said the Bushman, "he seeks to cross the pass over the mountain, by which our people crossed over years ago. He may there find friends and perchance raise another army."

"At the least," said Keshwan, "he would there go into hiding, and so save himself from the Dwarf's spear."

"As to that, we shall see, friends," said the Dwarf, and the pursuit pressed on.

For the rest of that day and the whole night they journeyed on as swiftly as the nature of the ground would permit. They had taken scarcely any rest since the pursuit began, so fearful was the Dwarf that his enemy would even now escape him. The legends say that food did not once pass the Dwarf's lips during that memorable chase, and if not more strictly accurate in this respect than legends usually are, they were not far wrong. Wonderful feats of endurance were performed in those days, without being much talked about.

Next morning they fell in with a fleeing soldier of Sekonyela's army. Choice of alternatives was given this man, between telling what he knew and being disembowelled by Keshwan's spear. It is wonderful what sound common sense some people display in an emergency. He told what he knew without any hesitation whatever.

It amounted to this. Sekonyela had overtaken and passed him an hour after daybreak, and would reach the valley before sunset. Here there was a hiding-place where friends awaited him. They were there when the Zulu army set out, for this man had seen them, and without doubt they would be waiting there to hear the result of the battle.

"Having told us this much," said Keshwan, "unless

you lead us now to that place where Sekonyela hides you shall be disembowelled in any case."

The man did not stop to argue, did not even stop to say what he would do; he just started out to lead them to the place straight away. He was one of the most sensible men in that country. But unfortunately he was wounded, had been speared in the leg. He loped along with the stride of a rabbit for about a mile, then had to give in. It was useless expecting him to go faster. And as the pursuers were in a fury to get at Sekonyela before he reached the pass, they had to leave the soldier where he was and push on by themselves.

It was nearing dusk when they came to the mouth of the valley. Here, as luck would have it, they fell in with one of those very old men whom Baroa the Bushman had found sheltering in the cave when he first encountered the Griquas. This man had seen Sekonyela only an hour or so before. He was certain that it was Sekonyela, because he had seen him with his own eyes come down the valley leading the army of invasion; and now with his own eyes he had seen him return to it a fugitive. And he knew, too, where Sekonyela had gone —but was sorry a moment later for having said as much.

"Then guide us forthwith to the spot," said Napo.

The old man hesitated and was afraid.

"Who am I, wanderers," he asked querulously, "that I should bring upon myself the wrath of this warrior who hath already wasted half the land? And who are ye that pursue after him?"

"Mind you," put in the Bushman severely, "those monsters that swept along this valley, and so frightened you that you well-nigh jumped to the sky, leaving your miserable skin on the ground?"

"Indeed, well do I mind them!" quavered the old man. "Devils they were of great horror and abomination, who have so blighted the earth that not for a hundred moons shall there be crops or provender! Wherefore——"

"Enough," said Baroa. "Show us now where Sekonyela hides, else shall these devils return straightway, stamping this land so flat that not even the mountain shall remain!"

"It is true," said the Dwarf. "Know you not that Sekonyela fought with and slew one of them in this valley?"

"I know it! The spot where that devil's blood gushed out is accursed, and grew bitter weeds to the height of a man in one night!"

"For which cause, and to save the whole world from such blight," said Keshwan, "we are come hither to avenge that devil's blood and to shed Sekonyela's."

The old man shook like a leaf.

"Failing which," put in the Bushman harshly, "we are commanded to destroy the land by a great blast of fire and lightning, so that all in it perish forthwith!"

"And are commanded first," said Keshwan earnestly, "to make a prescribed medicine from the vitals of any man who withholds information or would gainsay us in our purpose."

He held his spear as he said this close to the stomach of the old man, who showed at once that he was, after all, amenable to a sound argument.

"Come, then," he gurgled. "And if I show you truly where Sekonyela is, make report of the fact so that I, at least, may be saved from destruction."

It was easy for Keshwan to promise that he would.

"Who be these that are waiting here for Sekonyela?" asked the Dwarf, as they went forward.

"That I know not," said the old man, still shaking, "save that one is a woman, or so it has been reported."

Giant and Bushman shot at each other the same glance of doubt and questioning they had exchanged on the battle-field, but Napo saw it not. He looked up at the great bulk of the mountain which reared itself against the darkening sky, and fixed his eyes upon it. The mists were gathering already, but from somewhere in the depths beyond a faint refulgence from the sunset turned them into golden gossamer. What was passing in his mind the others knew not; but presently, as they passed on, he said:

"Giant, think you now I shall soon stand face to face with Golden Glory?"

"Had we but wings," said the Giant lightly, "we

might all stand thus now," and he pointed to the mountain-top.

"Of such was I thinking, friend," said the Dwarf; "save that a man must stand alone in that hour when he sees his Glory."

He said no more, and as neither Giant nor Bushman understood they made no answer.

Darkness had fallen when the old man stopped and, with a quaver, commanded them to keep silence. Then he turned sharply up a wooded slope and showed a footpath.

"Follow yonder," he said. "Soon ye shall see a hut. Sekonyela shall ye find there."

"Friend," said the Dwarf, "for this service I give thanks, that you have guided me for so many years of my journey."

The old man, who had been in the Dwarf's company for an hour or less, wondered at this, but left them, concluding he was mad.

The three went forward in single file, the Dwarf leading. The ascent was steep and the path rough. Moreover, the trees were so thick they could scarce see the direction they were taking. They climbed onward and upward, till it seemed they must be half-way up the slope of the mountain.

"The pass of which I spoke lies yonder," whispered the Bushman hoarsely. "If Sekonyela is in truth here, and that old man hath not befooled us, he shall be cut off from taking it, for there is only the mountain peak in front now."

"And if he hath befooled us," said Keshwan, who was puffing heavily, "I shall myself seek him shortly, and deal out such justice as will make the affair talked of in the country."

As he spoke they came suddenly into a little clearing, and just then, by ill-fortune, the Giant trod with his whole weight on a dry branch that snapped with a crack like a pistol shot.

In a moment they heard voices, saw forms to the number of three rush suddenly from the dark mass of a reed hut that was dimly visible, and, fearful of another failure, sprang forward.

What happened in the next few moments could not have been coherently described by any of them. It was all so sharp, so swift, so bloody and inhuman—as though beasts of the forest and not men were concerned in it—that Keshwan, when he told of the event afterwards, was at a loss to give it a consecutive description.

There was a shout, the sound of feet flying in the gloom, a voice that was Sekonyela's uttering a command, and next moment the Dwarf found himself struggling at death grips with a naked man.

"It is Sekonyela!" he called out.

At the same instant Keshwan felt himself seized round the middle and flung suddenly to the ground. That was Maponda's doing; but the Owl had little enough chance to do more. He made a lunge at the Giant with a spear, but missed him; then flung himself round like a tiger-cat on the Dwarf.

What followed only the Bushman saw clearly, perhaps because his eyes were keenest in the gloom, or because he looked on as a spectator only. There was, indeed, neither opportunity nor need for him to take part in the combat. He saw Napo, gripped in a fierce embrace with his ancient enemy, sway for a few seconds this way and that. He was evidently attempting to crush the life out of Sekonyela, and might have succeeded in doing so but for Maponda. For the latter, as he swung round from the prostrate form of Keshwan, aimed a blow with his spear at the Dwarf's head, missed it, and pierced his side.

The Dwarf felt a sharp, burning pain that leaped furiously through his veins and stunned him. Involuntarily he relaxed his hold of Sekonyela's body, and, if Maponda could have got in another thrust, that would have been the end of him.

But just at that moment Keshwan the Giant rose up, mad with rage, and next second, as in the twinkling of an eye, Maponda the traitor sprawled back dead, with his own spear, wrested from his grasp, thrust clean through his body. He gave what sounded to the Bushman like a groan that rose into a shrill scream of terror, but was really a commingling of two voices.

For, while all this was happening—and that was a

matter of seconds only—the third figure they had seen had sprung with sudden fury not on the Dwarf but on Sekonyela. Baroa saw who it was then; saw the shape and heard the cry of Letika:

"Dwarf, dwarf, fly or he slays thee!"

Sekonyela had lifted up his spear and was pressing the Dwarf to his knees. Baroa caught the gleam of the spear in the faint light, saw the girl fling herself like a flash between weapon and victim, and heard the thud of a spear-thrust and the crashing down of bodies to the dust.

There was a confusion of sounds then, the crackling of twigs, the swift rush of fugitive feet seeking a pathway somewhere, the flash of a dark figure bursting away through the undergrowth; then silence.

Napo, lying on the ground, partly raised himself and his hand touched that of the girl. Keshwan, panting beside them, stooped down.

"Oh, Dwarf," moaned Letika between her gasps, "hold fast for a while to this poor body ere I go into the darkness!"

"Methinks I, too, go into the darkness with thee," said Napo, labouring to take her into his arms.

"Nay, that path is not for thee yet," said Letika. "First shall ye tread this bridge that is between thee and thy Golden Glory," and she smiled.

"She, too, speaks of this Glory," muttered Keshwan, looking down on them with choking heart.

"If it lies in death she will soon find it," said Baroa. "Her breast is pierced through by Sekonyela's spear."

"But for her the Dwarf would himself be lying dead," said Keshwan, panting.

Letika raised herself slowly and painfully and looked round with scarcely seeing eyes.

"Oh, Dwarf," she said heavily, "go thou to this Golden Glory that ye seek, taking the gift of my poor life that ye twice gave me! Some day, if there is a place in the Great Darkness where we may behold and know each other, search for me there, if ye would give thanks, for I will await thee!"

"Thanks do I give now, O child," said Napo, pressing her to his bosom—"thanks that ye have shown

me there is a Golden Glory in such love as giveth life itself, and is happy in the giving!"

They lay silent and motionless for a moment. Keshwan could tell by the gasps of the dying girl that the end was very near, and he feared also for the Dwarf, who was badly wounded. He bent down and would have drawn the girl gently to one side, but the Dwarf stopped him with a gesture.

"Nay, Giant," he said with a smile; "my hurt is of small moment so be that one seeks death on my bosom who hath given me life and such love in abundance."

He drew the girl's head down to his gnarled breast.

"Girl," he said, in a voice thick with tears—"in that place whither ye go and I soon follow, all that we but dimly see shall be made plain. Then shall we know of this Golden Glory, what it is and why we seek after it, ye after thy Glory, and I after mine. And perchance it will be shown that all men travel along different paths to find the same Glory in the end."

"No glory have I sought, Dwarf, but thy love," said Letika; "and here at the end of life it seemeth that I find it!"

"Then that is well, child! Go down into death happy, knowing that ye have it in full measure; and may I also go down bearing my Glory with me!"

With her ebbing strength she lifted her hands and sought his face with them.

"Swiftly I die, Napo," she murmured. "Hold me thus tightly, for all slips away. There is great mist and darkness. Oh, Dwarf, Giant and Bushman, behold, I die!"

"It is finished!" said Napo, a moment after, in a voice that was muffled as though by distance.

Silently Keshwan stooped and removed the girl's body. The Dwarf arose slowly and painfully. His brain reeled and his breath came in great gasps. He looked down at the dead girl, as if stupefied.

"Friends," he said presently, "think not that she lies dead here, for soon shall her feet carry her along that path of her choosing. She is not dead: she sleeps but a while!"

"Nay, Dwarf, she is dead surely," said the Giant. "Think now of thine own hurt."

"Maponda's spear did it," said the Dwarf calmly. "And so, after all, am I brought to my end by the hate of a man, despite the love of a woman!"

"Not to thy end, Dwarf," said the Giant, thickly. "Down in the valley we may find simples for the healing of such a wound."

"Nay, friends," said the Dwarf, "bind it if ye will with thy loin-skin and a twist of grass, for the flow of blood weakens me. Yet to the valley, having set my face towards the peak, I may not return now. See!"—and, with a sudden exertion of the will, he raised shield and spear from the ground where they had fallen, and drew himself up smiling. "The end is near, but it is not yet! I go now most surely to see my Golden Glory!"

They bound up his wound with such skill and tenderness as they could, and he thanked them. Then he stepped forth, climbing the pathway with a swift, firm step.

CHAPTER XLI

In which the Dwarf finds his Golden Glory.

THROUGH the long night—or so the story goes—the three climbed and climbed, the Dwarf for the most part leading. But now and then Giant and Bushman supported him, for at times he grew so faint and dizzy that he would have fallen. Vainly they begged that he would turn back, or at least that one of them might return to the valley and there search out someone that could give aid; but to all entreaties the Dwarf, being wiser than they, turned a deaf ear, and after a time, when delirium seemed to possess him for a while, he spoke so strangely that they marched on at his side in an awed silence. And, indeed, the heart of each was filled with a sorrow that was too deep for words. Once as they climbed slowly, the two supporting him, the Dwarf stopped suddenly and said:

"Bethink ye, friends, how the three of us met long ago, and what adventure hath befallen! Like to our journeying is the life of a man. Love there hath been, and war, and hate, and much travail to little purpose, for after great effort all men come to the same end! The day passes as though it had never been, and behold, here is the night around us, and we press on—whither?"

He dropped into silence for a moment. Then:

"Bethink, friends, how a man pursues after his Glory, and the faster it flees from him the more furiously he pursues! And how few there be that overtake it while the sun shines! For it beseems, friends, that a man's Glory is set always on the far side of night, somewhere beyond the stars. Happy the man reach-

ing a mountain that shall carry his feet upwards ere the end! Friends, search ye hereafter each for his own mountain; then shall ye pass through the night fearing not at all, and shall meet your Golden Glory!"

"His mind wanders," muttered the Giant.

"Surely," replied the Bushman, "for he thinks now that we two follow after a Glory like himself."

"All follow it, knowing not how or why," said the Dwarf; then he fell again into silence, and the long climb went on.

But once, as they pressed forward, Napo turned again and said, almost beneath hearing:

"Comrades, now that this journey draws so swiftly to its end, it comes over me that in much that we think real there is but dreaming. I saw, but now as we climbed, one walking betwixt ye twain whose eyes closed in death many a long year since. It was a woman—her face I saw clearly."

"A woman!" exclaimed the Giant, with a start, and the Bushman shivered. "There was none here that we saw, Dwarf." A breath of the cold mountain air sweeping suddenly across his face made him shiver too.

"A woman most surely," said Napo—"whose eyes shone strangely, like stars seen through mist. I knew her at once for Haika, the Princess of our tribe, who was stretched dead on the field of battle by Sekonyela, before my head caught his next blow."

"Stretched dead, and by Sekonyela!" cried the Bushman in amazement. "Who then, Dwarf, is this Golden Glory whom you have travelled so far to seek?"

"Who then, Bushman," asked the Dwarf slowly, "are any of us that walk the earth save spirits clothed in a poor fleshly garment. Perchance when that garment of the flesh is rent, eyes shall shine forth like hers that shall show us Wisdom." Then he fell again into silence, neither Giant nor Bushman answering or understanding.

At last, in the grey light before the dawn, the three stood near the summit of the mountain, with only that peak of rock to climb, and that seemed too steep for a man's foothold.

"Hereabouts," said the Bushman, looking around

him sharply, "must be a pathway that crosses the mountain or goes upward to the peak."

"And that path without doubt Sekonyela has taken," said the Giant.

The two glanced across their shoulders to where the Dwarf stood a little apart, resting upon his spear and breathing heavily. His face, turned towards the east, was wrapped in contemplation.

Baroa the Bushman dropped his voice to a whisper.

"Either the fever of his wound goes to his brain or the man is mad," he said.

"Methinks he has not been of whole mind since first we met him," replied the Giant mysteriously. "That Golden Glory he follows after yet finds not anywhere—surely, Bushman, it is no more than a distraught fancy?"

"Sekonyela I saw plainly," said Baroa, "and that he fled this way there can be no mistaking, else the man hath wings. But that other of whom he spoke—you, Keshwan, saw you anything?"

"Methought yes, for a moment—something that stirred somewhat in the darkness, but had no form, and was mist probably."

"Mist of a surety," said Baroa. "See, yonder below not even a hill or a tree can be seen anywhere. We stand here on the earth, truly, yet in the sky!"

The Mountain of the Mist was well named at this season of the year. They looked downwards, and far as the eye could see was an ocean of fleecy billows. It rolled and surged, and tumbled upon itself slowly, and shredded away into little spirals here and there. But there was neither gap nor rent in its woolly surface, and no vestige could be seen of the world that spread out below. They stood, indeed, on a dizzy ledge of cliff, looking straight down into nothingness. And above them sprang up that sharp spike of rock, towering full five hundred feet as a beacon for fifty miles around. From the valley below it seemed smooth and precipitous. From where they stood, however, they saw that it was scarred and riven, and that down one face of it a sort of rude pathway had been hewn by the elements.

"Thither, if a man could travel that way, Sekonyela

must have gone," said the Giant, searching the peak with his eyes.

"And thither," exclaimed the Bushman, pointing suddenly, "the Dwarf follows him! Look!"

Both sprang forward at the same instant, but it was too late.

Napo the Dwarf had summoned up the last reserves of his gigantic strength, and at a bound he was clawing and scrambling up the steep face of the rock. He climbed with the agility of a baboon and the strength of a madman. Giant and Bushman set out in pursuit, but could make no headway. The path was so narrow and the rocks so steep that hardly a foothold could be gained anywhere. Yet the Dwarf climbed on—so swiftly and so surely that he presently became only a midget crawling on the face of that mighty tower, and a few moments later disappeared from view.

"What is to be done now?" asked Keshwan, panting. "In his fever and madness he will destroy himself while we wait here!"

"Better, then, to seek another path and climb after him," said the Bushman. "This way, it seems, the ground slopes somewhat."

He led the way along the edge of the cliff, and together they passed half way round the base of that towering peak. Sure enough, on the far side the upward slope lessened in steepness as they went.

"This way, without doubt, Sekonyela came," said Baroa. "Knowing the pass which lies yonder, he would have taken that way, and so escaped to safety, but that we followed too hard."

"Soon, then, since meet they must on this peak, he and the Dwarf shall settle accounts together," answered Keshwan. "Look, Baroa, here are footprints!"

Baroa had seen them, too, freshly made in the mist-damped soil which gathered about the base of the rocks. They began, then, to climb upwards as swiftly as they could, following the track of Sekonyela. The long chase across hill and plain from Setlu's kraal was drawing to an end. The far longer one, in which Napo the Dwarf had traversed half a continent, was ending, too; and, as it chanced, Giant and Bushman

were to be spectators of the last act in that savage drama of love, battle, and pursuit.

For suddenly, as they climbed, they rounded a great shoulder of jutting rock; and next moment both stood spellbound at what they saw.

High up on the very summit of the peak two forms were standing—two midget forms, made small by distance, the one tall and slender, the other bent and twisted, yet each outlined so sharp and black against the morning lights which gathered in the sky, that their every line and movement could be seen. They were standing on a flat ledge of rock that overhung a terrifying and dizzy gorge. Above them the dome of heaven was just beginning to be shot by arrows of crimson glory which gleamed redly on the towers and turrets of that rocky fastness. Below them vast cliffs and tremendous precipices went down fearfully into the ocean of rolling cloud which swallowed up the wide earth and made the whole scene as strange and unsubstantial as a dream.

The two figures stood there face to face for one pregnant moment, motionless as if carved in stone. If they spoke their words were few. Great wrongs and imperishable hatreds need not to be translated into speech at such a moment. It seemed, indeed, to the watchers that the two stood thus for an instant, simply gazing on each other. Then the fight began.

Giant and Bushman, from where they stood hundreds of feet below, saw it all. They saw the great reach of the Dwarf's arm as he stabbed furiously; the marvellous play of his shield as he warded off a blow here and made a feint there; the swift, almost cat-like movements of gnarled body and bent legs, as he sprang now this way and now that. They saw the dexterity with which Sekonyela escaped death a dozen times, and the magnificent attack with which he pressed his assailant back and forth, even to the very edge of that dizzy cliff, only to be evaded time and again at the last moment. They saw, too, that blow after blow went home on both sides, till it seemed that surely each must be riddled with a score of spear thrusts!

Only once, so tense was the fascination of this death-

struggle, did an exclamation burst from the lips of the two watchers.

"Now he is dead, surely!" gasped the Giant, seizing the Bushman's arm as with a vice.

The Dwarf had lunged, missed, and, before he could recover himself, was struck down by a blow from the other's shield. At the same instant Sekonyela's spear flashed up aloft, and came down like a lightning stroke. But the Dwarf had rolled aside—and almost rolled from the rock into the destruction of the gorge below.

Almost, but not quite!

"Look! Look!" screamed the Bushman. "They fight now in grips!"

For they saw the Dwarf's spear suddenly leap forward and upward, to be buried in Sekonyela's shield, wrested, in a brief and furious struggle, from his grasp, and hurled, shield and all, over the precipice. Next instant the combatants were grappling in each other's arms.

For a few awful moments the two men, locked in that last terrible embrace, swayed together, perilously near the edge of nothingness. It seemed to the watchers that both must be dashed down, to perish on the rocks below. Keshwan shut his eyes with a groan. Then he heard a faint, echoing cry which fell upon the morning silence with a note of terror and despair; and when he opened them an instant later, the Dwarf was standing on the rock alone!

"It is finished!" was the Bushman's comment.

Next moment the two were mounting towards the peak.

CHAPTER XLII

The passing of the Dwarf.

THE body of the Dwarf, when they reached it, was lying there on the rock betwixt earth and sky.

The Giant, his heart bursting, bent down and touched the dead face with his hand, then drew himself up to his full height and saluted.

"He died with a smile on his lips," said the Bushman, his voice choking. "Think you, Giant, that he saw his Golden Glory?"

"Nay, I know not, nor whether such Glory there be, save in the dreams of men," said Keshwân, solemnly. "Yet it were well that a man follow it, if his courage be great and his purpose high!"

"Ay; even though it lie not in the world, but—yonder!"

The Bushman stretched forth his hand; and both turned to look.

The dawn had come, and all that far expanse of billowy ocean was a sea of rolling fire. Wonders worked in it, and mysteries beyond a man's fathoming grew, unfolded, and waxed into a great splendour. The peak, too, caught some flying arrows of the dawn, as they passed on to flood the wide world with radiance. They fell about the three forms on the rock, touching the living and glorifying the dead.

When the two men withdrew and cleft for themselves a pathway through those seas of rolling mist, the dead lay solitary and alone. For the living, granting him that mountain fastness as a fitting sepulchre, came down and left him there.

THE END

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